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BY

J. OSWALD DYKES, D.D.

Author of "From Jerusalem to Antioch," "The Beatitudes of the Kingdom," &c.

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I.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DECALOGUE.

"*These words the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and He added no more. And He wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me.*"
—DEUT. v. 22.

"*Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: for they could not endure that which was commanded: 'And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:' and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, 'I exceedingly fear and quake.'*"
—HEB. xii. 18-21.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DECALOGUE.

THE Law of the Ten Words constitutes the very heart or kernel of the entire Mosaic system. Upon it as on a basis reposed the sacred covenant of the Hebrew nation with Jehovah its God. The two tablets of stone were preserved in the ark as the palladium of Israel's national independence. Around this brief code, as a nucleus, there gathered by successive accretions the ritual and the jurisprudence of Israel. It was the Law which lent to Mosaism its peculiar character as a temporary interlude in the history of revelation. If the ethical principles involved in this summary of duty were not the most valuable or original contribution made by Mosaism to the permanent religion of mankind, at least it may be said that, of all the portions of that system, the Decalogue is the one which has suffered the least through lapse of time. It passed almost unaltered into the New Testament Church. While nearly everything else in Judaism is grown obsolete, the code of ten commandments still keeps its place in the theology, the

catechisms, and the ritual, of the Christian world.

It is obvious that a portion of ancient revelation so stable and fundamental as this deserves to be very carefully studied. It retains for us a practical utility. My design in the chapters which follow is not merely to discuss the Decalogue as it was originally imposed on a newborn nation of emancipated slaves in the desert of Sinai, or as originally understood by them. Starting from its adaptation and utility to the Hebrews in the first instance, I wish to enquire what religious and moral principles underlie its clauses, to discover what light has been shed on these from later, especially from New Testament, revelation, and under that light to make some application of the ancient law to our modern life. The undertaking is a difficult one; and I cannot hope to carry it out as it ought to be done. But even the most imperfect or superficial examination of the Divine Commandments can scarcely fail to yield us many a humbling and salutary lesson in practical godliness.

In the present chapter I propose, by way of preface, to invite attention to certain general characteristics of the Decalogue Code as a whole, which may prepare us for approaching its Ten Words from a right point of view and in a becoming spirit.

I.

In the first place, every circumstance attending its promulgation was adjusted so as to lend to it a solemn and awful emphasis. The ceremony of the Law-giving itself was prefaced by a formal appeal to the tribes encamped on the vast plain beneath Jebel Musa, to know whether they would keep Jehovah's covenant or not, and obey His voice indeed. Then, after answer made and due pause of three days, with elaborate precautions taken against any rash approach to the rock mountain on which Israel's King was about to sit as on a tremendous throne in majesty of legislation, there came the memorable day. Amid the terrors of a thunder-storm, so violent that the mighty rock masses shook beneath it, a Voice was heard from behind the mysterious cloud vail that rested on the hill, which the prostrate and alarmed people knew to be the Voice of the Eternal. It uttered only those Ten Words—that awful Voice. It added no more. For such were the terrors of the scene that the crowd moved instinctively farther off and begged that Moses might act as mediator with the majesty of Heaven: "Let not God speak with us lest we die!" Thus it came to pass that those fundamental laws of religious and ethical duty were the sole portion of the national legislation which Israel heard at first

hand from the Heavenly Legislator. What had to be added was given privately to their leader. In the first instance not much was added. A few simple statutes were appended, regulating the legal customs of a pastoral and agricultural people under a primitive condition of society; * then, on the basis of this brief and elementary code, there followed the solemn scene which was designed to ratify and commemorate a new relationship between the people and Jehovah. Twelve memorial stones were raised. Oxen were sacrificed in patriarchal fashion. Half of the blood was sprinkled on God's altar; half of it on the covenanting people and on the manuscript roll which recorded the conditions of divine protection and favour. Finally, the awed people made response and said: "All that Jehovah hath spoken will we do and be obedient!"

Such were the original promulgation and acceptance of this code. With awful austere impressiveness, it was announced from heaven as the terms of a gracious league betwixt the Most High and those elect tribes in whose wondrous history lay the divine purpose of salvation and the religious hopes of mankind.

The subsequent treatment which it received only went to emphasise still more its unique importance. After Moses' first stay of forty days on Sinai, he brought down with him two

* The first draft of the legislation in Exodus xx. 22 to xxiii. 33.

slabs of granite on which he said God Himself had engraved these Ten Laws for perennial preservation. When the original slabs had been broken in his agitation, they were replaced by a new set on which Moses himself was directed to inscribe the same commandments afresh. In this second form, the tablets were ultimately laid up for security inside the ark of the covenant. By every precaution against their destruction and by every honour which could be paid to them, God seemed to intimate what a peculiar value was to be attached to this central code of duty; as though He would imprint on Israel and on us this great truth, that no rites of worship and no statutes of civil jurisprudence are of worth in His eyes unless, at the heart of them all, there lie enshrined and observed the great maxims of spiritual religion and of everlasting rectitude. It is morality which must lie at the basis of national order and prosperity. It is religion which must form a foundation for national morals. Both religion and morality must live as the informing soul at the centre of a nation's institutes, if the nation is to possess true vitality. Are not these the lessons taught by the very history of the Decalogue, and by its position in the statute book of Israel?

II.

In the next place, one cannot recall, as has now been done, the accessories of terror which

accompanied this legislation without being struck by this, that the sanction of the Decalogue was fear. In the infancy of the individual, when as yet the immature conscience lacks the power to enforce its convictions of duty upon the untutored passions, the first step in moral training consists in impressing upon the child's mind a wholesome dread for the constituted authorities of the home. Love is a preferable impulse to law-keeping, no doubt; but love cannot be wholly depended on till the habit of obedience has been formed and principle has come to the aid of affection. Meanwhile, therefore, for the sake of domestic order and for the gradual discipline of the will, there is need for some simple assertion of superior power enforcing its commands. Now, something analogous to this appears to have taken place at Sinai. The enfranchised slaves of Egypt were in a condition of moral childishness as well as of national infancy. Such authority as they had hitherto been accustomed to respect was the authority of the whip. If they were to be reduced to any sort of order, or drilled into submission to their new Master, an over-awing display of His power was indispensable. Sinai was such a demonstration. They who heretofore had quailed before the task-masters of Pharaoh, quailed now before the tremendous Conqueror of Pharaoh. They learned to know Jehovah as a Jove-like

Sovereign who wielded thunderbolts. Hereafter Israel must come to understand God better; to sympathise with His moral uprightness, to love His law for its own sake, and to delight in that mercy with which He tempers judgment. We, too, if we grow to be intelligent and adult Christians, shall be moved to walk in love, imitating God as dear children, and following the perfect law of liberty. But it is not all at once that either Israel or we can attain to this. For rude natures, destitute of self-control, law needs to repose upon power; it is the awfulness of the Voice from Heaven and the terror of the Law-giver's displeasure which lend to His words their sanction. As Moses said at Sinai, His fear has to be before our faces that we sin not.*

III.

It belongs to the same juvenile or primary character of this code, as designed for an infant people, that its requirements are concrete, and expressed in a negative or prohibitory form. When you have to deal with children, you do not enunciate principles but precepts. The principle underlies your precept no doubt. The ethical principle lends to the precept all its validity. When the principle comes to be recognised, it will take the place of the precept; it will supersede, indeed, a crowd of similar

* Exodus xx. 20.

precepts by one comprehensive law. Only you cannot commence with abstract rules of right; but with precise concrete orders. You do not bid a child revere all that is venerable in the social order; but you say: "Honour thy father and mother." You do not tell a rude populace that hatred drives God out of the soul, but you say simply: "Do not kill!" Everything must be, at such a stage of moral education, concrete, portable, and unmistakable. For the same reason, it will usually take the shape of a prohibition rather than of a command: a "Do *not*" rather than a "Do." Of these ten laws, no fewer than nine are prohibitive. This is never the form assumed by a moral system of duty adapted to an advanced or cultured conscience. But it is the form under which the imperative of law has to address itself to the young and the rude. Selfwill needs to be curbed and fenced in from doing harm, until it has acquired a respect for the limitations imposed by truth and the rights of others. This is the first stage in ethical education; the stage at which law acts as a fence, a limit to freedom, a check upon excess, a "bit and bridle"* holding in the animal impulses from without, until the trained reason and conscience can be trusted to act as a law unto themselves.

* Ps. xxxii., 8-9.

IV.

While these remarks must be borne in mind if we would understand the archaic mould in which this code is cast, there is at the same time an admirable breadth and massiveness about its contents. In Ten Words it succeeds in sweeping the whole field of duty. Let it stand for one proof of such comprehensiveness in the Decalogue as a summary of moral obligation, that, under the full light of New Testament morality, it has continued to be used for catechetical purposes in the instruction of youth, by nearly every church in Europe. Or, if any one seek a stronger proof still how strangely broad is this law of Jehovah when spiritually read, did not our Lord cite with approval a terse redaction of its ten words into two, and pronounce these to be the Two Commandments, "on which hangeth the whole Law and the Prophets"? * It has not been unusual for infant commonwealths to reduce the duties of citizenship into some most brief and venerable compendium, easily memorable, and serving for a norm, by which to test, or to which to refer, all later and fuller legislation. Witness the Law of the Twelve Tables at Rome. But what nation (to echo the challenge of its Leader) "how great soever, hath had statutes and judge-

* Matt. xxii. 35-40 (Rev. Ver.)

ments so righteous as this Law?" * So righteous; and also so lofty in their morality, or so embracing and complete in their range of obligation? This is the primeval law written on the human heart by God's finger once; but, blurred now, half forgotten, and half illegible, it needs to be rewritten as a hard and fast imperative coming from without to instruct the conscience and convict the offender of his transgressions. It is a re-revelation (or unvailing over again) of human duty. The first unvailing of duty had been within, in the moral sense of mankind; so soon as the Voice on Horeb was heard, it met its echo in that voice within the bosom. The Law is felt to be "holy and righteous and good."

V.

I have assumed above—what is indeed apparent to every careful reader—that the Decalogue was designed primarily to be the code of a commonwealth. In the ancient world, and perhaps in the infancy of all societies, the idea of the community takes precedence over the idea of the individual. The family, the clan, the tribe, the nation: these are the ruling conceptions to which the interests of the private individual are subordinated. Then, each man exists as one of a larger body—heir of its past

* Deut. iv. 8.

and parent of its future. For it is through his social relationships, and the duties, rights and restraints which these involve, that man is, in the first instance, trained to manhood. These form our school of practical ethics—the family first, then the community. Individualism is only safe at an advanced stage of moral growth. It was no more than a concession to this prevailing habit of thought in old times, when God threw his revelation from the days of Moses onward into a political channel. From the first Jehovah had transacted with Abraham as the destined ancestor of a race. Henceforth He transacted with a nation. He became its monarch. He prescribed its political and civil institutions. He presided over its fortunes from age to age. He raised to power its national heroes. He set up and put down its political leaders. The whole history of divine revelation from Moses to Nehemiah is simply the history of a State. It was involved in the rise, decline, and fall of a monarchy. It developed itself for the permanent instruction of mankind in the legislation, worship, wars, alliances, and political vicissitudes of a commonwealth. The Old Testament is unintelligible until this obvious fact has been firmly grasped. When it is grasped, then it becomes plain that the Decalogue is simply the primary statute law of the Hebrew State. It is a code for citizens. It

prescribes "the whole duty of man" viewed as a member of that sacred covenanted commonwealth which had Jehovah for its sovereign, and His anointed priests, prophets, and rulers for its guides and statesmen.

VI.

It is when one views the Decalogue under this aspect, that one can best see how it came to include two parts, a sacred and a civil. In a theocracy there can be no such sharp distinction as we make between Church and State. Indeed, such a distinction would have been unintelligible to any ancient people. So far from comprehending the modern ideal of "a free Church in a free State," every people of antiquity took for granted that the Church and the State were one. In Babylon and in Memphis as much as at Jerusalem; in Athens or Rome, as much as in Egypt or Chaldea; this opinion prevailed unquestioned that national life constituted a unity in which the nation's relation to the gods could not be severed from every other department of its national existence. The King was Pontiff as well. Every public function was discharged, every expedition undertaken, every victory gained, under the immediate counsel and patronage of the deity. All this was just as strongly felt by the de-

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votees of Bel or Nebo, of Osiris, Chemosh or Baal, of Athenè or Jove, as by the Hebrew worshippers of Jehovah. So that, again, when it pleased God to throw into the form of a theocracy His peculiar relationship to Israel as a vehicle for teaching to the world a world-wide revelation of grace, He was simply accommodating His gracious ways to the thoughts of men and the fashions of the age that then was.

Such, then, is the secret of the division of the Decalogue into two portions, or "two tables," as the phrase goes. Israel was a commonwealth with both religious and civil institutes, like other states. God was the object of worship as well as the supreme Magistrate; and each citizen owed to Him a double duty—as a member of the Church and as a member of the State. I have already hinted what lesson springs out of this—the lesson, namely, that you cannot safely divorce religion from morals, although you may divorce the Church, as an establishment, from civil government. The sacred heart of citizen obligation, of neighbourliness, and of social order, must continue to be, allegiance to the Divine Ruler. Man's duty to his God takes precedence of his duty to his fellow citizen; and only on the recognition and discharge of the former can the latter permanently, safely, or sufficiently repose.

As we proceed, we shall discover that the first three laws in this Divine Code are laws which regulate worship—its object, its mode, and its spirit; while the five which form the bulk of its later division are laws which conserve and regulate civil society: the statutes, I mean, against insubordination, against violence, against breach of wedlock, against dishonesty, and against false evidence. By these is guarded the well-being of the community in respect of the person, property, and reputation of the citizen. Between these two groups of laws there is intercalated one of a peculiar and complex character. The law of secular work and sacred rest partakes of both a religious and a civil complexion: it fitly supplements the first three and makes a link of transition to the next five. Still more exceptional is the last of the ten. Indeed, it is the most remarkable of all. It forms an appendix to the code. It makes it to be a code of public jurisprudence and *something more.* It indicates that to the Mosaic Law pertains a wider than the merely civic or national reference. The closing Law of Motive —or law against evil desire—plainly transcends the bounds of civil legislation. It lies *ultra vires* of a temporal magistrate. It could proceed only from One who was greater than any earthly sovereign. By entering the hidden domain of motive, it speaks not to the citizen

merely, but to the man. Therefore, it betrays a consciousness that in the end the individual will be found even greater than the community. Moreover, it serves to fling a surprising light backward upon all the preceding laws. It puts in our hand a new key by which to read them. It serves to hint that underneath the concrete prohibitions of the rest there lay deeper and more spiritual principles; so that they were not really kept when kept only in the letter. Thus it forms the transition to a new economy—a covenant of the Spirit. Like a point of attachment to which there was as yet nothing that could attach itself, it stood all through the Old Testament ages as an unfulfilled demand, a point of interrogation, a finger sign awakening desire for some better and future religion, without which Judaism "could not be made perfect." In this last statute, forbidding not overt act, but inward desire, we find a basis laid for that deeper theory of Mosaism which was long afterwards worked out from his own experience by St Paul.* In how many Hebrews' bosoms, as in his, did that law which said, "Thou shalt not covet," fan to flame the slumbering ashes of sinful desire! To how many did it come, as to him, reviving sin, and therefore slaying self-righteous conceit, by laying bare the helplessness of the carnal nature and its inherent anta-

* See Rom. vii. 7, ff.

gonism to the holy and perfect law of God! From how many did it extort the evangelical prayer: "Create in me a clean heart!" Blessed be God, that prayer was answered as time rolled on by the evangelical promise: "I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them forth out of the land of Egypt . . . This is the covenant that I will make . . . I will put My laws into their mind and on their heart also will I write them."* Of this promise the New Testament is the fulfilment. The Law achieved its highest function when it trained men in the consciousness of sin and kept alive their longings after Christ who was to come. Now, God grant that its requirements may all be fulfilled in us who have it in our power to walk, not after the flesh, but after that Spirit of God who dwelleth in us!

* Jer. xxxi. 31-34; quoted in Hebrews viii. 8-12 and x. 15-18.

II.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT:

PART I.

"*God spake all these words, saying: I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage: Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*" —EXODUS XX. 1-3.

"*I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other Gods before Me.*"—DEUT. v. 6, 7.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

BEFORE we can worship as we ought, we must know what or whom we worship, and why it is we worship Him. Two things are necessary. The object of religious devotion has to be defined, and it has to be set into some ascertained relationship with ourselves. The very first law of worship, therefore, will be one which defines its Object—limits it, or marks it off from all that is not worshipful; "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." And the basis of this law must be such a self-disclosure on the part of God as sets Him into a specified relationship to man and gives Him a corresponding claim over man's homage: "I am Jehovah thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt." This declaration of the second verse * is needful to sustain the demand in the third. On both of these verses, as on its deepest foundation, is reared the whole edifice of religious and social duty.

I.

What we have first to look at, therefore, is the self-disclosure of God, upon which He grounds His claim to Israel's devotion.

* In Exodus xx.

There was nothing absolutely new about the declaration: "I am Jehovah thy God." It summed up, no doubt, all earlier revelations of the Divine Being to the patriarchs of the Hebrew race who lived four to five centuries earlier, but it did not go beyond them. Even this recent name of JEHOVAH was not now heard for the first time. It had been announced to Moses at the Burning Bush.* Yet what a moment was that in the religious history of man when the voice of the Eternal proclaimed Himself from heaven in human ears! What mistakes of early thinkers were corrected! What deep divinings of the soul were turned to certainty! What yearnings after fellowship with the Unseen were justified and fulfilled in this brief authoritative self-declaration of the Supreme! God is a Person; a Personal Spirit like our own; a self-existent, eternal Spirit, apart from and above His world; a Person capable of entering into converse with men: who, that knows anything of the deepest questions which at this latest hour agitate the thought of Europe, does not know that these are answers to them? And these answers lie embedded in this early, almost earliest, document of the Hebrew race. To us who accept

* Then, at least—see Ex. iii. 13-16; to leave on one side the disputed question of its earlier occurrence, and the exact force of Ex. vi. 3.

the divine legation of Moses, there is an additional security and comfort in believing that these truths came straight from the awful Author of truth, the Hidden One Himself whose being we desire to know. But, let them have come how they may, they did enter into human minds and take shape in human speech; for there they are. They did possess the heart of a people; for Israel—the best of Israel—was just what these majestic truths made it to become.

The self-existence, eternity and spirituality of God—all of which are wrapt up in His name "Jehovah"—are the truths which make a rational religion possible. A divinity which is in any such sense entangled in the material forces of the universe, that it cannot front man's spirit with a free will like our own, is not a Power to which we can address any better worship than that of fear. A nature-god, who does not stand clear of physical forces as their antecedent originator and spiritual Lord, but only works through them, under limitation from their laws, as we work through them; is a god we may dread, and try to make an ally of. He will be desirable as an ally, by how much he is stronger or wiser than we are. But no such god can be the object of the spirit's absolute and utter worship: to none such can the undivided and unrestricted homage of a free noble

human soul be paid without fatal loss of self-respect. If such devotion as the First Commandment requires is to become possible, the God we are to adore must be conceived of as Himself a free, eternal, personal Spirit—in a word, as Jehovah.

Yet the knowledge of God's personality and independence of the world, although it renders such worship possible, will not of itself evoke it. Worship is evoked, not by any bare abstract conception of the Supreme Being, however adequate or true; but only by the relations which such a Being sustains to ourselves. A God afar off, with whom we could hold no dealings, would practically be an unworshipable God—a Deity, at whose shrine no man would bow. For before we will draw near to pray, we must believe, not only that He is, but also that He is the rewarder of them who seek Him.* A naked objective out of relationship with mankind, is a Deity of the schools to speculate on—not a Deity of the altar, before whom hearts can bend in supplication or in praise.

Now the relationships which God sustains to human beings are various; and according as you base your religion on the one or other of them, will your religion vary. Let the Unseen Being be conceived of as primarily a creating

* These elementary conditions of the religious life, as given in Hebrews xi. 6, are scientifically accurate.

Power, or as a providential Fate, or as a Patron and giver of success, or as a moral Lawgiver and hereafter a Judge:—you shall have a religious character fashioned in the worshipper to correspond, and a ritual adapted to express it. The whole of revelation, Jewish and Christian alike, consistently sets Jehovah in a peculiar relationship to men which is none of these that I have named. All of these indeed, it assumes, but it super-adds something characteristic of its own. Out of this new relationship, the religion of Moses and the religion of Christ do both equally spring; and it is here that their deep spiritual identity is to be detected. They are at bottom one religion; because they start from an identical conception of God, and they reveal Him under one and the same identical relationship to His worshipper.

What is that relationship? It is that of a Deliverer.

The Jehovah of the Bible is our Maker, unquestionably; our Providence, too; our Legislator, and Rewarder, and Arbiter. All these, with other characters, does He sustain. He sustains them to all men, and, as common and underlying and natural, they are everywhere taken for granted in Scripture; but the character which is peculiar to the God of revelation, and which it has pleased Him throughout the history of revelation to sustain toward selected men,

is that of Deliverer or Saviour from evil. Is man in bondage? Jehovah sets him free. Is man assailed by foes, visible and invisible? Jehovah is his defence. Is man sick in soul? Jehovah heals him. Is he under sentence of law? Jehovah redeems him. Is he spiritually dead? Jehovah regenerates. Whatever evil in brief His chosen people underlie, the history of revelation is the history of gracious interposition for rescue and deliverance out of it. "I am thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the House of Bondage!" "Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people!"

Let now these two conceptions be put together—of what God is, and how He stands related to us: The Eternal Spiritual Person, who is before and above all things; yet allying Himself with human beings, to set them free from spiritual and material evil:—What follows? This follows:—'This God shalt thou have for thy God; and thou shalt have no other!' A tie on both its sides solitary and unique must bind the human person with the Divine; saved with Saviour; Jehovah's people with Jehovah's self.

II.

We are now, you perceive, in a position to examine our fundamental law, or First Com-

mandment, defining the Object of Worship. It has resolved itself into this: a mutual relationship exists betwixt God and His human people, absolutely unique and exclusive. Besides Jehovah, Israel has no other Saviour; Israel therefore ought to know no other God.

Look first a little more closely at the solitariness of Jehovah, in His capacity of Deliverer. To Israel, first among the nations, was this great truth made known, that God is not merely supreme, but alone. It is not the supremacy of Jehovah, which the Hebrew religion contended for; supremacy of one central god over many nearly every polytheism admits. One of Jehovah's titles is "Jealous;" and He could not reign merely as *primus* or president, over a senate of subordinate tribal deities. If, in some early or degenerate days of Israel, this was the popular conception of His position, it was a conception which had to be, and which was, utterly repudiated by the nobler teaching granted to that people. Jehovah is not simply first; He is first without a second. He is not the highest of a class of beings, but in His class He stands alone. He shares His honour as little with semi-deities, or heroic men, or angelic ministers, as He will lend it to the imaginary gods, that are but personified powers of nature. What men call "gods many" are in fact, not deities, but rather nonentities. He alone is; from everlasting is; the "I am

that I am;" the solitary Jehovah: "To whom will ye liken Me?"

From this solitariness of the Godhead, flows by rigorous consequence what I have called the uniqueness of His position as man's Deliverer. Beset as Israel was, as all men are, by evils manifold, within and without; to whom can Israel look for such salvation as it needs? Men are His creatures, and His tools; gods beside Himself there are none: the heavens and the earth are His; only to Him belongeth power: on whosesoever side He is, theirs is victory and safety. Other Helper have we nowhere; beneath the covert of His everlasting wings must we run to hide. The recent startling emancipation of their feeble tribes out of the grasp of the mightiest empire upon earth, was a demonstration on a great scale, meant to be memorable, that with Jehovah alone is salvation. Alone, He had humiliated the gods of the Egyptians; alone, He had broken Pharaoh's power and chastised his land; alone His right arm had cleft the sea, and snatched the people of His choice from bondage, to the awful freedom of the mountains and the desert. What was Israel, but a representative of every man whom God wills to deliver? What Israel's servitude, but a specimen of every ill from which humanity requires to be delivered? What the Exodus, but a pledge of other acts of deliverance, which

Jehovah stands ready to accomplish for His people? The whole story was a call, writ large, to oppressed, ruined, or suffering men everywhere: "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is none else!"

What a call, then, was it, how heart piercing and inspiring, to the chosen tribes themselves! Having seen what Jehovah did, and how, as on eagle's wings, He bare them to Himself—how ought Israel to recognise His unique relationship and claims, as its only God, and only Saviour! Set among the polytheistic nations as a people of protestants, protesting by their very national existence that there was no God save one, it was natural to cast this law into the negative shape which it wears. Tempted as they continually were, to break down their sense of the solitariness of the divine nature, by merging Jehovah-worship in a facile toleration of heathen divinities, what form of the command could have been more impressive or appropriate, than this prohibitory warning form: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me!" But behind this shell of a negation, think what a kernel of positive duty lies concealed! Man's response to a unique deity, is unique worship. Piety becomes the concentration of the heart's devotion upon the undivided Godhead, who is our solitary Helper, Saviour with His single arm! If we are not

to people the heavens with shadowy powers, half divine, or parcel earth among forces of nature, as the provinces of an empire are parcelled among satraps, or elevate human aid into the remotest competition with the Almighty's; if the mind must tolerate no confusion between what is of God and what is not God, nor suffer its hopes to be scattered among a crowd of more or less capable saviours; if to us there is but one seat of power, source of help, well-head of blessing, author and finisher of deliverance from every species and form of evil: then, what undivided dependence upon God results! what absoluteness of trust! what singleness of loyalty! what unstinted gratitude! what perfect love! The soul of man is left hanging by a single cord upon a solitary arm. It is not sufficient to say, we shall not split our formal worship, or multiply altars to foreign gods, "offer their drink offerings, or take up their names into our lips."* More is shut out than polytheistic rites. Superstition is shut out, which trusts in mechanical aids and not in the free, living, and righteous Will. Magic is shut out, which seeks to extort deliverance by spells from unholy spirits. Luck is shut out, and the vague hope in what will turn up. Spiritual tyranny is shut out, which makes one man the

* See Psalm xvi., which is the response of a pious soul to this First Commandment.

lord of another's faith and conscience. Policy is shut out, or godless state-craft, with its trust in human foresight, but none in the justice of Providence. Irreligion is shut out, which doubts if prayer avail or God can help, and puts its confidence only in the strongest battalions. Everything in short which divides the deep trust and hope of the heart between God and that which is not God, becomes a breach of loyalty to the unique, the solitary Deliverer. And the language which faithfully echoes the postulates and claims of this First Command, will be such language as this:—

> Only upon God doth my soul wait:
> From Him cometh my salvation.
> He only is my rock and my salvation—
> My defence: greatly moved I shall not be.
> My soul, wait thou only upon God:
> For from Him alone is my expectation.*

You will recognize it as a key note of Hebrew piety in its purest examples, this concentration of all faith, hope, desire, expectation, pride, thanksgiving, loyalty, worship—in a word all *love*—upon Jehovah. The devout soul claims Him alone as her God and Saviour. All her wellsprings are in Him. One thing only does she desire—to behold His beauty and dwell in His house. In brief: to love Jehovah our

* Psalm lxii., verses 1, 2, and 5; the authorized version slightly changed.

God with all the heart and soul and strength and mind is the be-all and the end-all of Bible piety. For this is to have no other God beside Him.

It is not difficult to translate all this into the language of the New Covenant. To us still there is but "one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through Him."* We do not split our religious homage, when as Christians we approach the Father through the Son. Our faith and hope are still in God, as exclusively as ever. Moreover, Jehovah is our God, just as He was Israel's, in virtue of the deliverance He has graciously wrought on our behalf. The characteristic claim which in Christ God makes over the undivided confidence and allegiance of a Christian, is substantially the same as He made upon Israel: "I am thy God which brought thee forth out of the kingdom of Satan, out of the bondage of sin." Only our deliverance is infinitely deeper, grander, and more memorable than that of the Exodus. The interposition of Jehovah to rescue men from spiritual and eternal ruin has been one to task the endurance of God. It has been effected through His humiliation and by the travail of His soul. Therefore it has unfolded to us the riches of

* 1 Cor. viii. 6 (Rev. Vers.)

His divine nature. It has set the Eternal into more complicated relationships of grace with humanity. It has exhibited to us, not only God the Father, merciful and mighty, but also God the Son, incarnate for man's redemption, and God the Spirit, the Renewer and Sanctifier of His people. If the appeal of the First Commandment had force, and laid upon Israel the duty of knowing and acknowledging Jehovah to be the only true God, and its God, and of worshipping and glorifying Him accordingly ; * with what tenfold force does the Gospel appeal to Christians ! It is the august voice of the triune Jehovah, self-revealed for our gracious deliverance from sin and misery, which from the cross of Jesus speaks now to our contrite hearts. It says : "I am thy God ; I have saved thee with an everlasting salvation : thou art Mine." It bids us be His. It asks for our utter and unreserved confidence in Him as our Redeemer and Deliverer. If you will accept of God in those gracious relationships which He has assumed towards you—as Father, Mediator, Comforter ; as Fountain, Channel and Giver of every blessing, of whom, and through whom, and by whom are all good things you need : then to God thus knit to you by unique indissoluble bonds of grace, yield yourself up in the

* The Westminster *Shorter Catechism's* amplification of the First Commandment (q. 46).

entire surrender of love. Trust Him for everything: obey Him implicitly: glorify Him alone. What, save an attitude on our side of absolute consecration and devotion to God as our God, can be any answer to the attitude of grace which He has taken up on His side? Let Him therefore reign in the firmament of your spiritual and religious life without a partner or a rival. As there is in heaven one sun, so have thou no other god beside Him!

III.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT:

PART II.

"*Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*"—DEUT. vi. 4, 5.

"*The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.' This is the first commandment.*"—MARK xii. 29, 30.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

IT is the uniform teaching of God's Word that the highest moral life for man must find its deepest basis in a godward bent of his whole nature. The fall was primarily a falling away from God. Our proper relationship to God was first ruptured. Every other form of moral evil came in the train of that. It follows that the work of our restoration by the Gospel must begin with the re-establishment of the lost relationship betwixt the soul and its Maker. Only then, when God gets His due again, and we are set into the becoming attitude towards Him by penitence, religious trust, and forgiveness, is there a foundation laid on which holy character can be gradually built up. Hence the very earliest demand which the Almighty Father has to make upon His revolted child is that he should return to Him, and give Him his heart again; should reinstate Him (that is) in the rightful place of love and honour at the centre of the moral and religious nature. To do this is to restore healthy blood to our distempered constitution. It must in time convey a wholesome

energy through every part. For the love of God replanted in his heart becomes a spring of goodness and blessedness to the entire life of man.

Quite in harmony with this bearing of piety upon ethics is the startling fact, of the truth of which any one may satisfy himself, that on no point of moral obligation is the average conscience so apathetic as on this duty to love God supremely. Multitudes whose sense of honour is nice, who would resent the imputation of falsehood like a blow, who behave in society with scrupulous courtesy, who are pure of conduct and generous to the poor, do nevertheless spend existence in utter forgetfulness of their Maker, without so much as a suspicion that they are doing anything amiss. How continually do we hear outspoken persons, especially in the humbler ranks of society, avow that they do not need to be much afraid of judgment because they have never harmed any one, when their whole life has been one unceasing robbery of God and contemptuous ignoring of His claims. To the right of a customer to a fair measure, or the right of a neighbour in misfortune to a little kindness, people generally are sensitive enough. It seldom occurs to them that the Eternal Being who made them and gives them life and all things, has any right over them, or the least claim upon them. What Christ terms the first

and the great commandment carries therefore to the average conscience next to no sense of duty at all. It is as though the moral faculty were paralyzed on that side of it which lies nearest to God. Of course, one's reason perceives, when the matter is considered, that reverence, and gratitude, and worship, and resignation, and even warmer affections, must be due to One in whom we live and move and have our being. But the admission hardly excites in any one a feeling of shame for not having paid the debt. People act practically as if no such duty existed, or as if the lifelong neglect of it were no sin, scarcely even a fault. Is there not something positively appalling about this blank in our moral nature? As if one entire side of us were cut off, and that the upper, nobler, and more heavenly side!

This being so, it serves for one of the first indications of a new life quickened from above when this insensibility begins to pass away. Have you ever become alive and awake to the claims of the First Commandment? Has it come home to you with the pain of a discovery that behind and above all your other faults—faults of temper, of unclean desire, of insincerity, of unneighbourliness, by which you have broken the commandments—there towered this stupendous accusation that you have never loved God as you ought? Never even feared Him as

you ought? Much less honoured, served, or glorified Him as you ought? If God has rights at all, due to Him at our hands, these dues of His must excel all other duties incumbent on us. His must be the holiest claims, the breach or oversight of which must be of all delinquencies the most culpable. And the state of heart which can year after year ignore this duty with complacency must be of all states the most deplorable and fatal for a man to abide in. Well do the saints deplore the misery of him who loves not God. "Alas," says St Augustine, "wretched soul, that neither loves nor seeks Christ; it remains parched and miserable. Its life is death, not loving Thee! He who does not desire to live to Thee is nothing, and lives for nothing. He who refuses to live to Thee is dead." Instead of treating ungodliness as a word with a terrifying sound only, signifying nothing, the soul that is fairly awake shakes with the conviction that ungodliness is the sin of sins—the very sin that blots out the sun in heaven and slays the spirit's noblest life. If any one's conscience lies in such a palsy that although he takes no pleasure in God, yet he feels neither regret nor shame nor alarm on that account, it were good for him to pray that there may shoot through him some shock of spiritual force such as will arouse him out of lethargy. Good for such a man to feel how torpid his soul

is at the heart of it, how dead to the very root and innermost of his moral being!

Let me rather turn myself to those who have begun, though in some feeble degree, to love God, or, at the least, who desire to love Him. I wish to suggest to them how central is the place which this blessed duty holds in a devout and pure life, and how essential it is to their comfort and well-being that in this grace they should grow, giving to God more and more an undivided and supreme affection.

Consider then how the moral character of a Christian attains to simplicity when it finds its centre in this divine love.

St John has given us in a single phrase the key to the keeping of this First Commandment when he says, "We love Him because He first loved us."* The affections of the creature must be kindled at that most fervent fire which possesses God Himself. Now, if there be any single attribute in which the moral character of the Supreme attains to unity, that attribute is His love. More truly than any other quality in Him, wisdom, power, justice, or even pity, this may be said to be the divine nature—"God is love."† Especially in His relationship to us as our Deliverer from evils, has His love been made conspicuous. It was remarked in the preceding chapter that the characteristic attitude assumed

* 1 John iv. 19. † 1 John iv. 16.

by Jehovah in Old and New Testament revelation, and particularly in the Gospel, is this of a Saviour from every evil. Well, let that be the relationship under which we have learned to welcome, embrace, and confide in God through Jesus Christ; and we shall find that we have welcomed to our embrace mere, pure, and boundless love. Trace our redemption to its source: love drew Him from the sky; love urged Him to the tree; love raised Him from the tomb; love seated Him on the throne. Are we associated with the company of God's invited children, within His sacred house? Love spreads the table; love furnishes the feast; love invites the guests. Range through the record which memory keeps of God's private dealings with you: is it not all unmingled marvellous love? Love bore with your sin, and pardoned it; love made you for an enemy a dear son; love chastens and love comforts; you walk abroad with His love environing your steps like a sweet atmosphere. What is the Gospel of His grace but one amazing forthpouring for our benefit of that affection for the fallen sons of men which lay deepest within God's heart—"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." *

"Brethren, if God so loved us, we ought also to love"—Him! "God loves," says one,

* 1 John iv. 10.

"that He may be loved!" There is no other emotion whereby the soul can respond in any fit degree to her Creator. By what other link can you, with equal closeness or approach to a common standing-ground, bind finity to infinity, feebleness to strength, guilt to holiness, or earth to heaven? With the understanding we cannot comprehend God. With the active powers we cannot minister to Him that He should miss our help. Adore Him we must; but adoration keeps the worshipper afar off in distant self-abasement. How, then, shall the Eternal Father and His lowly child, man, be brought into any intimacy of embrace at all, or even touch one another, nothing between? By this tie only: He loves us and we love Him. "Love makes one spirit out of two." * Into this single affection, therefore, all other emotions of our hearts towards God need to gather themselves, adding their strength to it; so that with this sweet and privileged emotion of divine love we may, as it were, touch God, and pour back into His bosom our whole being in return for that love wherewith He gave Himself for us. "Unite my heart to fear Thy name!" prayed one of old; a wise good prayer, which, on our Christian lips, has grown to this deeper, better one—"Unite my heart to love Thee wholly!"

Ah! if we give our God His due, there will

* Augustine.

be an undividedness in our personal consecration to Him such as few of us have begun even to understand. Those words of Deuteronomy which our Lord recited to the scribe, and which, they say, every Jew was expected to recite to himself morning and evening at his devotions, form a most penetrating commentary on the First Law in the Decalogue; and you see how they tax language to express totality of dedication on our part to this love of God. Every part of every man, and the whole of every part, is to be filled full with love. In the *heart* is to be love's seat; the central organ, by Hebrew usage, of human nature, and "focus of the personal life," out of which "goes forth the entire mental and moral activity" of man. There, I say, is to be love's seat, her throne indeed; for she is to reign as well as dwell there, a gentle queen over all those other affections and impulses which lie nearest to the centre of our being; so that nothing shall be tolerated within ourselves, in our conscious personal life, that is not inspired, controlled, or sweetened by the love we bear our God. If this be gained, the rest must follow. Such love will overflow through all the three main channels by which our personal life pours itself abroad upon society. The *mind* or intellectual activities will obey it; the *soul*, or emotional and passionate nature, with its social sympathies and earthly affections,

will obey it; the *strength*, or forces of the will, by which a resolved and energetic nature imposes itself upon others, and subdues circumstances to its purposes—this too will do its bidding. In short, the entire organism of the individual life is to stand entirely at the service of our love for God; so that our character, disposition, behaviour, and work shall come to be just what a supreme affection for our Saviour God determines them to be. Less than this is less than duty; less than this is less than blessedness!

"When loves comes" (says again a father, whom I have quoted before) "it captivates and links to itself all the other affections." In this way the love which we bear to God acquires a complexion very different from that which we give to our fellow creatures. For the elements which enter in to colour it are very different.

For instance, veneration enters into it. The soul that loves God starts from an exceeding lowness of level and aspires to an infinite height. There is an inexpressible grandeur in the Object of our devotion which trains and allures the soul away from every base conception or unworthy familiarity, and teaches love to gaze with shaded eyes and a most reverential mien upon the awful Majesty who is, at the same time, so dear.

Penitence, too, and the shame of our own un-

worthiness, cannot fail to enter. For the nearer we come to Ineffable Purity, the less worthy of it do we feel ourselves to be. The more we love God, the more we desire to be as holy as He is; the more also do we bewail our faults and abhor ourselves;—so that this divine love is largely dashed with contrition, and the heart where it abideth is like a fountain of tears for its own uncleanness.

Dependence, too, and the sweet grace of humility which that breeds, cannot be absent from the lover of God. When we love the weak, or such as lean on us, we experience the joy of giving blessings. But when we love God, it is as they who can only receive of His fulness, favour upon favour. On Him, therefore, we lean, to His hand we look; and with a hopeful restfulness, the soul that loves rejoices to think that all her expectation is in One so good.

Such submissive, confident dependence on our Father's and our Saviour's grace makes our love to God unpresuming; gratitude makes it ardent. Gratitude for the tender mercy that has washed us in the blood of God and for all the unspeakable benefits He hath bestowed on us, is the hot fount whence the stream of our love is kept ever warm. The love of the saints for the Father of our Lord Jesus is love that never can forget the Cross even amid the splendours of a heavenly crown; but must be for ever casting down its

honours at the feet that were "nailed for our advantage to the bitter tree."

Oh, love divine, how many rills of sacred and pious affection contribute to colour and to swell its flow! But when adoration and contrition and lowly trust and fervent gratitude have done each its own part, and love, like a swollen tide, bears their mingled tribute along to Him who loved us unto death, in what ocean doth it merge at last? Surely in a glad blending of its own with the supreme and blessed will of the Eternal Lover! For the perfection of creature love is to have no other will but His who is very Love Itself: to desire nothing, choose nothing, endeavour nothing, but what pleaseth and fulfilleth God. In resignation and obedience is love consummated. On them is her strength spent. "Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, O Father; our Father, which art in heaven!"

How far do we fall short of such attainment in the keeping of this most sweet commandment as is worthy of saints! A commandment it is; and therefore to fall short of it is a culpable and criminal defect: but a privilege it is, not less than a duty; a beatitude for the devout soul. The blessedness of any soul's interior life is measured exactly by the degree in which the whole heart is given to God. Failure here, therefore, injures ourselves as well as wrongs

our Heavenly Father. Moreover, it stunts the development of the moral character. For as one has said, "Charity never comes into the heart without bringing in with her the whole train of other virtues;"* whereas, when the flame of divine affection burns dim and the heart grows cool to God, the motive power has failed which ought to move and govern all the life of goodness.

A commandment I have called it, imposing duty on our consciences; a privilege, too, bringing blessedness along with it. Thank God, it is something else as well; it is a grace of the Spirit for which God is to be entreated. None but Himself can teach us how to love Him aright.

Like every other grace which God waits to confer on seeking souls, this grace has to be nourished by appropriate methods. If we would grow in love, we must be much in secret meditation. It is in the presence of God we learn this holy art of loving Him. When we can realize Him near us, and fill our minds with His loveliness, and summon up to "sessions of sweet thought" what He has done for love, and sit down to muse contritely at the cross-foot, and by patient acts of confession and self surrender make room within these crowded hearts of ours for the Dove of Purity and Peace—it is then the love of God is shed abroad in us. How little

* Francis de Sales.

do most of us know of such patient culture of the inner life! How seldom do we seek for our souls the consecrated frame, the undivided surrender, the ardour of devotion which this great commandment calls for!

Do we ever make leisure in our lives for such interior exercises? or do we only sigh after it in vain? It is not impossible in a busy life. There are always shreds of time wasted that might be saved for such self-culture of the heart. A right note well struck in the morning would help to tune the whole hard-working day. Besides, few days are so hard wrought but now or then the soul could call herself together, secretly realize the Divine Presence, and by a momentary inaudible ejaculation, dart upward to the Father Above one glance of loving desire. It were well to do it. It is very useless for engrossed and active people to sigh after some impossible condition of life in which they think, under different circumstances, they could be so much more devout. Useless, because these different conditions will never occur. Useless, too, because if they should occur, the same disinclination to secret worship which wastes our spare moments, would equally waste whole hours of leisure.

Besides, it is really questionable whether a less occupied life would be more favourable to devotion after all. Men of affairs and men who

struggle are apt to envy the quiet and contemplative, just as King David coveted above all things the occupation of the priests whose monotonous round of service kept them in the precincts of the tabernacle :—

"One thing have I asked of Jehovah—that will I seek after!
That I may dwell in Jehovah's House—all the days of my life!
To gaze upon Jehovah's beauty—and to contemplate His abode!"*

It was probably a vain desire. Had David been a priest, he would never have been the man he was: perhaps not even the saint and the psalmist that he was. For if quiet and contemplation be conducive to the nourishment of divine love within the bosom, activity and struggle in the outward life are needful to elicit its force and give it scope for exercise. There is certainly a happy balance which is best. Let us retire within, that faith and prayer may nurture a secret love for God our Saviour. Let us go forth abroad, that divine love may approve itself in active service and a holy life. In both let Jesus be our Model. Only let us see that we do yearn to possess this sacred flame of a devout affection, and tend it within our souls, however feeble it may be. Let us ever aspire to a more complete, unreserved and settled

* Ps. xxvii. 4 (nearly Perowne's version).

dedication of our hearts to Him who first loved us: until love consume our evil lusts; and love make worship delightful, obedience easy, and trial light; and love prepare us for that ideal beatific state of celestial preoccupation, when—all else being swallowed up in adoring love—the pure soul shall find eternal rest and joy ineffable in union to Him whose name is Love!

"O Paradise! O Paradise!
Who doth not crave for rest?
Who would not seek the happy land
Where they that love are blest?
Where loyal hearts and true
Stand ever in the light,
All rapture thro' and thro',
In God's most holy sight!'

IV.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT.

"*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.*"—EX. xx. 4-6, and DEUT. v. 8-10.

"*This is the true God and eternal life. My little children, guard yourselves from idols.*"—1 JOHN v. 20, 21 (Rev. Vers.).

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT.

UNDER the general name of idolatry we are apt to confound two separate offences in religious worship. The one is the offence of addressing our worship to any false divinity; the other, the offence of addressing worship to any divinity whatever under the form of a material likeness. These two errors, which were often confounded by the Hebrews in popular speech, just as they are among ourselves, are, nevertheless, sharply discriminated by the law-giver. The First Commandment defines the sole object of religious observance: the Second, the right mode of religious adoration. The First condemns false gods, and, by consequence, plurality of gods; since in any polytheism all save one must be false. The Second condemns worship by means of images, or the representation of God for purposes of devotion under any material emblem.*

* It scarcely needs to be said that no one above the very lowest stage of barbarism ever worships the image itself, but only the Divine Being through such a representation of Him. When the material object is identified with the god, worship has sunk beneath idolatry. See later, page 62.

For the practical uses of the decalogue at the time when it was promulgated, these two prohibitions hung very closely together. They touched the two points at which Israel was destined to be a protest against the prevailing beliefs of mankind—I mean the unity and the spirituality of God. The Hebrews had come out of Egypt; and Egypt was a land crowded with the images of a two-fold mythology—of the old African deities with their bestial emblems, and of the new foreign gods of the Shepherd dynasty.* They were going into Canaan; and the tribes of Canaan had defiled it everywhere with traces of Baal and Astarte—Syrian deities, partly cruel but mainly obscene. Everywhere it was the same thing. All nations had their polytheistic creed, and all nations revered the gods under endless material forms. In order to lift the world in some far-off age out of this debasing type of religion, it pleased the Eternal to commit to one race the open secret at once of His solitariness and of His immateriality. But that race itself, like its neighbours, was already wedded to lower forms of worship. It needed to be educated up to its destiny, as the apostle to mankind of a pure monotheism

* That the tribes had brought small, portable images of the Egyptian deities with them into the wilderness, and were secretly paying them honours there, seems to be implied by Ezekiel, chap. xx., ver. 6-8.

and a spiritual worship. The history of many a century to come was to be the record of a dark and bitter struggle waged by these higher truths at once against the downward propensities of Israel itself and against the tremendous pressure of paganism all around.

A desperate situation calls for desperate measures; and the pure faith in one spiritual Jehovah would have had no chance at all if it had parleyed or made terms with polytheistic idolatry. Intolerance was the condition of its own existence. Self-preservation called for unpitying severity against every breach of either the First or the Second statute. The truth is, that to worship Jehovah only, and to worship Him in His own way, was something more under this Hebrew code than a duty of religion. The code is, properly speaking, a national one. As I said before, it deals with religion as the primary factor in the national life, which lies at the root of national welfare. Under the conditions of the Sinaitic covenant, idolatry wore a threefold aspect. Religiously, it was a sin—involving dishonour to God and bringing falsehood into the creed of the community. Politically, it was a crime—an act of treason against the Divine Head of the state, the supreme Lawgiver and Magistrate of the theocracy. Personally, it was likewise a wrong; for it was, like adultery, a breach of sacred contract, un-

faithfulness to the covenant by which Jehovah took Israel for His nation and Israel took Jehovah for its Lord. Under the first of these aspects, false worship might not be an offence punishable by public law; but under the second of them it entailed death on the individual, and under the third, when it became wide-spread, it entailed disasters on the commonwealth. Regarded from any point of view, it could not fail to appear as the capital transgression by which not only the welfare of the State was imperilled, but the very reason of its existence us a theocratic and redeemed nation was contradicted. Unless Israel was to uphold at any cost those fundamental truths, for the sake of which she had been selected and favoured, the whole justification for her wondrous history vanished. Hence the unrelenting and bloody penalties* by which violations of these first two commandments were avenged. Hence too the drastic measures prescribed in the details of subsequent legislation,† in order to extirpate, were it possible, every vestige or reminder of idolatry from the Sacred Land.

To our minds I think the First Law, defining one sole object for our undivided adoration, is apt to carry its own sanction with it far more convincingly than does this Second Law. The

* See Ex. xxxii. 15-29.

† See Deut. xii. 2, 3; xxvii. 15.

idea of God's unity, and of the gross folly as well as impiety of associating any subordinate Power in the reverence we pay to the Maker of all, has come to be perhaps the most fixed of all religious ideas in the mind of modern Christendom. To Judaism belongs the honour of first teaching that lesson. Mahommedanism did much to vindicate it. Protestantism re-asserted it; and now science has come in to endorse it. The world, it is admitted, has no room for a plurality either of creators or of rulers. But there is a good deal to be said, and it has often been said with plausibility, in favour of material aids to devotion, especially for rude and untaught worshippers. The prohibition of such assistance hardly strikes one as self-evident. By Scripture it is made to repose on the pure spirituality of God. In Deuteronomy,* Moses is introduced as emphasizing this law, by reminding Israel that "on the day when Jehovah spake in Horeb, ye saw no manner of similitude." Such an inference from the doctrine of an immaterial Deity approaches very closely to the famous utterance of our Lord in Samaria: "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."† Now there is no doubt that this idea of worship, once it is stated, justifies itself as most worthy of its Object. Still the question will

* iv. 15. † John iv. 24.

recur: Is not such a conception of God too subtle, and the worship which it involves too arduous, for the bulk of mankind? Most minds experience a prodigious difficulty in fixing the attention, or engaging the affections, upon an unembodied, featureless Personality. The best proof of this is just the tendency of mankind, which has proved so inveterate and general, to employ in its approaches to the unseen some tangible or visible assistance, some emblem at least, if not an image, as a peg on which to fasten the wavering thoughts, or a symbol by which to suggest to itself that impalpable and inconceivable One who eludes every attempt to grasp or define Him.

It is conceded that a mental image or notion of God the worshipper must frame for himself. It is certain that if that conception is to be vividly present to thought, it will in many cases body itself before the mind's eye under some imaginative form. Such mental images of Deity must unquestionably be in every case vastly imperfect, regarded as representations of the Infinite and Everlasting One. Seeing then that we cannot help conceiving of God in our thoughts under forms which are unworthy of Him, where can be the harm (so many have asked) of assisting ourselves to realize His presence by outward symbols, although these too are confessedly unworthy? God has never shown Himself dis-

inclined to stoop to human frailty. In many other ways He permits most imperfect views of His greatness; as for example, when He addresses men in language borrowed from their o wn imperfections. He has been content to let people think of Him as they best could, and has never disdained the worship which rested on such miserable anthropopathic conceptions. Why should He have so energetically and absolutely refused us this aid to worship—the aid of material images—after which the common heart has always hankered?

For the trustful and obedient it may be answer enough to reply—"Even so, Father! for so it seemed good in Thy sight." The command of the Most High is equally binding, whether we can read behind it the reasons for it or not. The Romish apology for image-worship that through such assistance the vulgar are enabled to worship better, is one which cannot be allowed to stand against a categorical prohibition of images; not even if it were true in point of fact. But I think we are not reduced to fall back on blind submission to the Second Commandment, as to an arbitrary dictum. Let us see if we cannot, as intelligent children of our Heavenly Father, gather some reasons for His interdict on idolatry in the narrower sense.

Take a practical test. Idol-worship stands condemned by experience. The whole history

of paganism, as well as of debased Christianity, has proved beyond a doubt that the employment of material representations to provoke or elicit religious feeling has universally tended to degrade both the Divinity and the worshipper.

It tends to degrade God; chiefly through the power of the mental law of association. The idolator does not at first confound the Deity with the picture, statue, pillar, cone, or whatever other symbol he bows before. His mind is quite able at the outset to discriminate the dead stock from the living Power whom he is adoring. Nay, except in very brutish and unreflecting persons, the image and the god never come to be entirely identified. When that lowest stage is reached, of total identification, the object is properly an idol or image no longer. It is become a fetich. But the habit of continually associating in thought this piece of dead matter with the living God, the employment of the one to recall the other, the tokens of external reverence addressed to the idol as representing God, the limitation of worship practically to the presence of the idol, with the feeling which inevitably results that the divine presence is equally local, limited to the spot where the image stands; all this forges in the mind so close a link betwixt the Invisible and His visible similitude as degrades the divine. It is impossible to preserve a sense of God's pure

spirituality when He is always adored as locally present to the senses in the form of a piece of matter. It is impossible to treat an image as a virtual representative or *locum tenens* of Deity without assuming that God somehow resembles His representation. The progress of idolatry is therefore downward. The original sins of the fathers are visited upon succeeding generations in the gradual darkening and debasing of the religious instincts and the rapid growth of superstition. The extent to which this lowering of the mental conception which the worshipper entertains of God may go, will vary according to the worshipper's intelligence. But so far as it goes, it can be nothing but degrading. It must obscure the essential glory of the Divine Nature. It must materialize the Divine Image.

Nor can it do this without a corresponding reflex injury done to the worshipper and his worship. This is an invariable rule: "Like God, like worshipper." If you degrade my conception of the Power before which I bend as my ideal of all conceivable excellence, need I say you have immensely degraded me? I cannot revere a limited, localized, materialized divinity, believed to be somehow embodied in a stone, without inflicting a wound upon my own nature; for he who worships, makes himself the inferior of the object he adores! Besides, the less spiritual God is conceived to be, the less spiritual

does the worship become which is rendered to Him. Idolatry tends in this way to destroy inward reverence, awe, and moral submission to the Powers Above. It becomes the prolific parent first of formalism, ritual and routine, next of superstition and magic. To a material divinity belongs a mechanical or non-moral cultus. If I can compel my God to dwell with me under the figure of a statue, what may I not compel Him to do? The idolator who began by fabricating an image to represent his God, ends with retaliating upon God by whipping His image, or fawns upon God by caressing it. Easy and plausible are the early steps of a sensuous worship which ekes out the feebleness of devotion by mechanical assistance: only they have always proved to be steps on an inclined plane, the end of which is a gross and senseless caricature of religion.*

When we turn from such methods of representing God under material forms to those purely mental conceptions which we are able to form of Him, we become aware of a great difference. It is not that the idol is an unworthy representation of God, while the conception in the mind is a worthy one. No; both are faulty. My thoughts of the Eternal are a long way from being worthy or adequate.

* See this descent traced step by step by an inspired pen in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

In the infancy of religion men's conceptions were usually erroneous as well as inadequate. Any race that was capable of reverencing the Supreme under the shape of a young bull, or of an ape, or of a piece of stick, may be safely assumed to have reached no mental idea of Him that was not contemptible. What then? Is it not as bad to frame a poor, low, false notion of Divinity in your mind as to make a picture of Him. No, it is not: for one reason. The mental notion is capable of being improved. It tends, in fact, to elevate itself with the general elevation of mankind; whereas the material idol tends only to a further degradation.

Let us try to see how this should be.

So long as men conceive of God as an immaterial personal Power, they will clothe Him with attributes reflected from their own breasts. He will be to His rude devotee a Superior Man. Now, such a conception may include features which are wholly unworthy of God. It may project upon the invisible world the image of a crafty, selfish, irritable, or unjus man. But then everyone sees that such are the childish blunders of an untutored people, out of which they may be set free if better light be given; out of which they can scarcely fail to grow as civilisation, speculation, and moralt grow. Just as men learn to discriminate between

the best and the less good in their own nature, so will they attain to nobler conceptions of Him who, if He is to be worshipped at all, must be conceived of as at least better than ourselves. By degrees, one would expect reflection to strip the popular idea of Godhead of all the baser elements and infirm passions of human nature, till the Divine came to be viewed as a higher form of that only which is best in man—his reason, his conscience, and his social affections.

This process of religious elevation has never been realized on a large scale as one might expect it to be, and the main hindrance has always been the hold of idolatry upon the popular mind. Even where thinkers and sages have succeeded in rising along this line to a purer conception of Deity, it has been impossible to raise the average public of paganism, simply because the visible gods have too powerfully impressed the vulgar mind through the senses or the imagination. Besotted by a gross materialistic worship, the idolator cannot shake himself loose from unworthy or debasing ideas of the Divine Being. His upward path in religious knowledge is barred at its outset. None save the few have been able in idolatrous lands to break through this chain of association, so as to picture to themselves a Divinity without parts or human infirmities, immaterial, spiritual, and perfect.

It follows, of course, that if the Most High designed to train Israel, and, through Israel, the whole world, to the loftiest and truest notion of Himself attainable by man, He must begin by placing a stern veto upon those material representations which could only fetter their religion down to a pagan level. But notice where that long process of training in the true knowledge of God was designed to terminate. I have said that man can only conceive of the Personal Power who rules above by transferring to Him the noblest, and none but the noblest, features of man's own nature. The spirit in man is nobler than his body. God is a Spirit, not representable under any bodily shape. The noblest faculties of the human spirit are these: —reason, or the power to perceive truth; conscience, or the power to prefer and choose good over evil; and free will, or the power to originate action. These, therefore, raised to an ideal height, we ascribe to the Divine Being. We adore Him as Infallible Reason, Faultless Goodness, and Absolute Sovereign Will. Now, better than this we cannot do: higher than this we cannot go. Still the question remains: Are we in all this following a reliable or a delusive guide? What is it we are doing? We are virtually finding an image or reflection of our Maker within ourselves. We are crediting Him with being the perfect Archetype, after whose

likeness our own moral and spiritual physiognomy has been fashioned. Are we justified in doing so? The question is one which marks the limit, beyond which speculation upon Deity cannot go. No answer to it is to be had from nature or reason. From revelation it has received two answers: an answer in word, when God said, "Let Us make man in Our likeness!" An answer in fact, when the Son of God was made flesh, and we beheld His glory. Perfect Man is God's image. The anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament lead up to the incarnation in the New. Now we do possess an image of the Invisible Godhead: an image human, and therefore conceivable; yet not an image material or visible to the senses. It is not the flesh of our Lord, but His immaterial character which mirrors the Father. The flesh even of Jesus profiteth nothing as a representation of the Divine Glory. But the spirit of Jesus, His words that are spirit, His acts that discover character, His self-revelation as righteous love—this is the likeness of the perfect Godhead.

Having thus an image which we may lawfully and helpfully picture to our own minds, it ought to be an easy thing for us to keep ourselves from idols. We, when we draw nigh to worship, approach the Invisible and Incomprehensible through the Man Christ Jesus. Such as we

picture to ourselves the gracious, lowly, and pure Son of Mary, such is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us humbly employ, to aid us in our acts of worship, the human character of our Lord. Let us be thankful for such assistance. Yet let us beware lest we abuse even this image into an idol. Let us strive towards an ever worthier conception of Jesus Himself. Let us carry into our thoughts of God no touch of the frailty of human nature —of its partiality, of its ignorance, of its one-sidedness, of its vacillation. For in Him is no darkness at all. And still, as at Sinai, is the Most High a jealous God—jealous for the truth of His own nature ; jealously concerned, that is, to be truly apprehended by His worshipper and truly represented by the conceptions which we frame of Him. As He would not be misrepresented by the pagan's degrading handiwork, so neither would He suffer injury in our thoughts. Be you therefore jealous for the honour of the Lord God of Hosts. Be careful to sanctify Him in your hearts. Be scrupulous to cherish the loftiest idea of His grandeur, holiness, and love. And let all the worship we presume to offer at His footstool be such as becomes the revelation which He has made of His own glory in the person and in the cross of our Lord and Saviour.

V.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT.

"*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord* [Jehovah] *thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.*"—EXODUS xx. 7, and DEUT. v. 11.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT.

In the First Commandment, the solitary Object of religious observance has been declared in opposition to false or secondary divinities. In the Second, the spirituality of true worship has been vindicated, against sensuous methods of conceiving and representing God. It remains to decree the true spirit of worship—the religious awe or reverence inspired by the moral elevation of Jehovah—which lies at the root of genuine piety.

This I take to be the inner sense and ultimate scope of the Third Commandment. At the same time, the Decalogue is, in the first instance, a code of Criminal Statutes, prohibiting offences punishable by the magistrate. The deeper principles which underlie its observance, consequently, do not appear upon the surface of it. What we have here, according to the letter and primary meaning of our text, is not a precept requiring Israel to fear God, but a statute prohibiting perjury and blasphemy. With this exterior form of the law, therefore, we must commence. Let us hope it will conduct us to its abiding and penetrating spirit.

The language of this ancient statute is not

free from obscurity, possibly from ambiguity. It forbids men to take into their mouths, or to lift up in solemn utterance, the awful Name of Jehovah, when that is done in an improper manner. But what constitutes "an improper manner"? The words we translate "*in vain*" may either mean *falsely*, that is, to cover a lie; or they may mean *without reality*, that is, as an empty hollow pretence. Hence there arise two applications of the statute; the one narrower, against false swearing; the other a good deal wider, against the idle and irreverent use of the Divine Name for any unworthy end whatever.

From very early times the Commandment was seen to split into these two branches. For in the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus, in a passage which reads like a popular rehearsal of the Decalogue, we find it amplified thus: "Ye shall not swear by My Name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the Name of thy God: I am Jehovah."* The two crimes which are thus bracketed as violations of the Third Law—perjury, namely, and blasphemous or profane language—were punishable by death under Mosaic jurisprudence. They were so on this ground that they both alike insulted the majesty of Israel's King, and broke down that reverence for the person, the character, and the authority of the Divine Lawgiver on which the Hebrew

* Levit. xix. 12.

commonwealth reposed. That perjury is a crime severely to be visited in the interests of civil order is still admitted by the modern jurist. But the ground on which modern society punishes the false swearer is not so much his profaneness as his falsehood. It is because false evidence on oath shakes the foundation of justice. The ancient feeling on this subject was rather different. All ancient States felt that fear for the gods lay at the basis of true speaking among men; and that whoever was impious enough to invoke the Eternal to attest a falsehood, struck at the religious reverence, without which there is no adequate security for human law. The perjurer was obnoxious to penalty, not only because he witnessed falsely, but also because he insulted the all-seeing God who guards the truth. It is from this point of view that the Third Commandment condemns false swearing. It is a crime against God. From the point of view of its falsehood, as a crime against man, it falls to be judged by the Ninth Commandment.

But if the impiety of a false oath merit punishment at the hand of law, then does all impious speech (even when no false witness is involved) merit the same punishment? This is an inference which you will find the children of Israel hesitated to draw. When the first case of gross blasphemy occurred,* the magistrates of the

* See Levit. xxiv. 10-16.

young State felt at a loss how to proceed. It required a special oracle from the invisible King to decide upon the blasphemer's doom. That fearful instance constituted a judicial precedent. By what is termed "case-made law," death by stoning became the penalty for blasphemy no less than for perjury.

So far of this Commandment as a criminal statute for the Hebrew State. Let us now inquire what moral ideas underlie it, to be of perennial and universal authority.

The point at which perjury and blasphemy meet, or cross each other, is this: They both treat with contemptuous dishonour the character of God. The false swearer takes for granted either that God is so indifferent to veracity that He will endorse a falsehood, or else that He is a nullity whose name covers no real Person at all. The blasphemer imputes to the Almighty what is unworthy of Him, and treats Him as One whom it is safe to flout at or insult. Both of them fail in the grossest conceivable fashion to pay to God the honour and glory which are due to His revealed nature, perfections, majesty, and holiness. In this, accordingly, must be sought the essence of their sin. Its root is an irreverent spirit; a temper of irreligious disrespect; a condition of mind that fears not God.

It is very apparent that the state of mind thus condemned is fatal to all religion. Worship

is the expression of a worshipping attitude in the soul. Such an attitude is the fitting response to what is worshipful in the Divine Being. If God has been pleased to discover to us any venerableness in His nature and attributes, we are guilty if we fail to venerate Him accordingly. And the Name of God in Scripture phraseology is but a compendious sign for all that God has made apparent in human experience of the hidden majesty or goodness of His own nature —in a word, of what Scripture terms, His "glory." Before that manifest glory of the Divine, man's becoming attitude is one of reverential awe and fear. In this fear or religious veneration, lies the indispensable basis of all religion. Destroy that, you destroy the very capacity for worship; nay, for spiritual life itself. Flippancy or contempt for the Divine—is the death of the soul.

It follows from this that, although the form of this Commandment is outward, its essence consists in an inward state of the heart; and although what it seems to prohibit are overt acts of crime, what it really requires for its full observance is the very spirit of piety. Hence it condemns by implication a great deal which falls very far short of either blasphemy or false oaths. For example:—To assume a profession of piety for private ends, or from unworthy motives —is to break this law. To wear a sacred office

without possessing the spirit of it—is to break this law. To affect zeal for divine truth when it is victory for our own party opinions we are aiming at—is to break this law. To discharge the offices of worship in public or private in a careless mood with wandering thoughts—is to break the law. To jest with holy subjects, to make the Church of God a mere arena for faction, to discuss and dispute over His saving Word as a theme for barren intellectual display—these are acts which break the law. To forget that God rules the world, that all truth whatever is His truth, and that all right action is His will—this would be a breach of this law. To mock at sin, to sneer at principle, to crumble down the edge of responsibility, or to empty of its solemnity either the life or the death of men—all that surely breaks this law. To cherish towards God Himself a querulous or a suspicious temper; to affect without sincerity a needless scepticism; to question the wisdom or the kindness of His allotments; to brood moodily over His providence; to pare down to a minimum the large charity of His Gospel; to trust Him little, to dread Him without cause, and serve Him in a bondman's spirit—are not such things as these breaches of this law? It cannot be enough surely to keep the lips from idle oaths or the flippant speeches of the scorner, unless in our heart of hearts we honour as it deserves the

venerableness of the Father's majesty, trust as it deserves the generous grace of the Son, and welcome as it deserves the holy influence of the Spirit. In brief, keep this law according to the inmost thought or meaning of it—and you will be found to breathe over all the movements of your intellectual and social life just such a tender, reverent and devout aroma of piety as befits the closet and the secret hour of prayer.

The sense of reverence for the supernatural and unseen Power that rules the world—which we thus perceive to lie at the foundation of all religion—is awakened in the human mind both by the superhuman greatness of God and by His superhuman goodness. In the lower forms of religion, it is chiefly His greatness and not His goodness which impresses the worshipper. God is awful because He is inconceivably more powerful than we; because His knowledge is practically boundless; because He is our Maker and the Arbiter of our destiny; because from age to age He never dies as we do, but abides unchangeable and immortal. These non-moral attributes of the Most High are exceedingly impressive. They are fitted to overawe the weak hearts of mortals; and in the early ages of religious growth, when mankind was yet young and science had not been born, it was upon such attributes as these that the instinct of worship fastened and fed. The mystery of the invisible

Power in nature—its overhanging fatefulness—its continual presence—its inexplicable modes of showing itself; these were what dominated the imagination and shaped the religions of early mankind. The awe which such a conception of Godhead inspires is of a low order; it is near akin to fright; it runs with fatal ease into superstition; and it is always undermined by the progress of knowledge. There is consequently a great deal of truth in the modern claim that, as the world grows scientific, it must outgrow that superstitious dread of the supernatural which is so often called by the name of religion. Against science as a solvent of the religious spirit, paganism, or the religion of nature, provides us with no defence.

When we turn to the pages of revelation, we find that our reverence for God is claimed pre-eminently on a different ground. It is characteristic of the Hebrew Scriptures that they bring into prominence, into increasing prominence, as the most awful feature in Jehovah, His holiness. That they term emphatically His "glory;" and on the strength of that they claim for Him our deepest veneration and fear. The majesty of God as the all-powerful, all-wise Creator and Sovereign, is far from being overlooked. Often is it dwelt upon to humble human pride and lay our hearts low in the dust. But the attributes of Jehovah which, far more

than His physical superiority, abash the Old Testament saints, shut their ashamed lips, and keep their feet far off from presumptuous familiarity or a too close approach—the awful attributes which fence about the dwelling place of God with terror, and shadow the hearts of the boldest with awe—are His moral attributes: His inviolable purity, His righteousness, His terribleness against sin, His faithfulness to the truth, His unapproachable holiness.

> "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of Hosts,
> The whole earth is filled with His glory." *

You see at once that the veneration which is awakened by a Person of surpassing purity and goodness is of a nobler sort than that which we feel for an unknown and resistless Power. This reverence is more nearly allied to love than to terror. It cannot degenerate into slavish superstition. It affords a foundation for a manly worship; and for a worship which we cannot outgrow, since as mankind progresses in the understanding of itself and of the world, its moral ideals only rise higher and stand forth in serener light. Strength and mystery and fate may oppress us less, now that we comprehend better the reign of law; but goodness and purity remain no less awful in their divineness than before. He who challenges our

* Isaiah vi. 3.

worship because He is thrice holy, rests His empire on a claim that can never be questioned. The pavement beneath His throne shall not be undermined for ever.

Notice accordingly how, as revelation proceeds, and we descend the stream to New Testament times, the non-moral attributes of God suffer an eclipse, and the moral qualities of the Divine Name come more and more to the front. What have we in the Son of God? One "crucified through weakness." Jesus does not appeal to our worship on the strength of His superhuman power or overwhelming mastery of material resources. Rather He becomes poor that He may found an empire on moral force alone. By the sheer majesty of goodness; by an ideal of moral beauty—infinite purity, infinite gentleness, infinite truth and love; by this God now commands the veneration of mankind, and fills every heart with worship. He is "glorious in holiness;" He is "fearful in praises;" awful is His grace; and before His goodness the world bows down!

Hence it follows that with all the strange condescension to human feebleness which we find in the incarnation of our Lord, with all the childlike boldness which the New Testament encourages in men whom Jesus calls His "brothers," there is no relaxation of the ancient law of reverence. A deep and awful fear of God

lies at the root of New Testament, no less than of Old Testament, piety. The reason is that, just in proportion as we have been led to see deeper into the moral character of the Supreme, into His patient kindness, His abhorrence of evil, His determination to conquer it by love, His profound sympathy with suffering and His willingness to suffer—just in that proportion are we brought into the presence of that in God which renders His name truly awful and fences Him about with unapproachable light. Genuine fear of God consists in the recognition of His holiness—that is, of the sum of His moral perfections; and when Jesus lays on our lip the prayer "Hallowed be Thy Name!" He teaches us to "sanctify God in our hearts" that He alone may be our "Fear."*

I cannot resist a painful impression that much of our current religion errs through want of reverence. We come with unprepared minds to the holiest services. We dogmatize conceitedly about the most awful mysteries of life and of the faith. We thrust forward a rash hand to prop the tottering ark of God. We prattle glibly, with an easy familiarity, about the names of Persons before whom archangels bow. We are not ashamed sometimes to mimic in our worship the artifices of the showman, and to rival the attractions of the music hall. There is no doubt a

* See Isaiah viii. 13, quoted by St Peter, 1 Pet. iii. 15.

false pretence of reverence which thinks to make religion solemn by keeping up stately buckram forms and conventional rules of decorum which have no genuine reverence in them. For that kind of venerableness in the House of God it is worth no man's while to contend. But a spirit inwardly sensitive to the real solemnity of God—a heart that secretly bows down in earnest awe before the holiness of Him who is utterly and inconceivably above us—a silent shrinking of the soul from any rash or light familiarity with One, the latchet of whose shoes, even while He walked the earth, none of us was worthy to untie:—this would be a happy improvement on much that offends in modern Protestantism. You cannot build a strong, grave, or manly piety on anything else than veneration; and no man can front the terrible problems with which religion has to deal, or study long the character of Jesus as the image of the Divine, or live much with God beneath the shadow of the cross, without being aware of a deepening soberness of tone, a gathering awe, a trembling fear, a solemn worship at his heart, which will render him very impatient of the vulgarities and the flippancies and the impertinencies which disgrace the shallower forms of religious life in our England of to-day.

Alas! what reason have we all of us to kneel in dust and confess our breaches of the

Third Commandment! How poorly have we after all understood either the majesty or the holiness of Jehovah! How little honour have our spirits paid Him! How rash have we been! how irreverent in worship! How degrading are our thoughts of Him! how presumptuous our words concerning Him! The good Lord pardon in this thing the iniquity of His servants, and grave deep within us that warning of our Lord which echoes the ancient utterance of the law on Sinai:—"Fear Him which after He hath killed has power to cast into hell—yea, I say unto you, fear Him!"

VI.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

"*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.*"—EXODUS xx. 8-11.

"*Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.*"—DEUT. v. 12-15.

"*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; so that the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath.*"—MARK ii. 27, 28 (revised version).

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

On a cursory glance, it may surprise us to read this Law, prescribing labour and rest and fixing the proportion between them, in a code filled with the most solemn and fundamental duties, both of piety and of morals.

For, let us take note at the outset, that this is a law both of labour and of rest. "Six days shalt thou labour" is no less imperative and essential a portion of it than the other portion: "on the seventh thou shalt not work." It is true that over the greater part of mankind the primitive law of toil asserts itself, vigorously enough. Hunger, cupidity, and the will of the stronger are all grim taskmasters, urging the vast majority of human beings only too inexorably to "eat their bread in the sweat of their face." It is in the interest of every son of toil that the beneficent Lawgiver would impose a limit upon this law of work by placing at the side of it a law of rest no less authoritative. He fences off a sacred space that He may lay an arrest upon the encroachments of greed, and say to the taskmaster: "Thus far shalt thou

come, but no farther!" It will always be found, however, that a reasonable obedience to the law of labour is necessary to our full enjoyment of this merciful law of rest which limits it. Idle people, with whom every day is a day of leisure, and *ennui* the chief of enemies, cannot know what a Sabbath means. Before they can be in a position to observe the day of repose, they must learn to do a week's work. To all of us who are not incapacitated by disease or old age, the Creator has appointed our work on earth, directing us to that share in the variegated field of human activity which belongs to us, partly by our special aptitudes, and partly by providential circumstances. It is no less His will, than it is for our own interest, that we should discharge our appointed task diligently and faithfully, during six days out of seven. Whatever be the function by which, under the complicated arrangements of a highly-civilized State, we serve the community, and by service earn an honest living—in fulfilling that function we are keeping the Fourth Commandment. It is a Commandment which, like the rest, was graven deep on the constitution of the world, before it was written upon tables of stone.

But, at first sight, as I began by saying, this prescription of so much rest to so much work scarcely appears either so necessary or so important as the sublime laws with which it stands

associated. Does it not seem to you a sudden descent from the first three, defining as they did the awful Object of religious worship with the mode and the spirit in which He is to be adored, to come down to fix what part of our week is to be a holiday? It seems so; and, in fact, a good deal of criticism has been expended upon this Commandment tending to show how inferior it is to the rest. It is said not to be a moral law at all; but only a positive or arbitrary one, and, for that reason, a temporary regulation for Jews, but not for mankind; a law having no basis in the nature of things, but merely in the circumstances of the time or the choice of the Lawgiver.

Now, the dispute whether we can properly call the Fourth Commandment a moral one or not, appears to me very much a dispute about terms. If by "moral" you mean to describe some duty which binds all conceivable moral beings whatever, then it is no more moral than obedience to parents, for example, or fidelity to wives. Neither of those can apply to persons who have no wives and no parents. Yet we call both filial piety and conjugal chastity a moral duty, because they bind the conscience of all moral agents in the situation to which they apply. So this law of intermittent labour and repose may not apply, for aught I know, to the angels, or to men in another state of being;

but for men in this world it is substantially prescribed by the conditions of our existence.

First of all: To work and to rest alternately, with a certain average proportion of time devoted to each, is prescribed to man by the conditions of his physical well-being. To attain the ends of his existence upon earth and maintain his powers in healthful exercise, a large amount of labour, with certain intervals for rest intercalated in the time devoted to labour, is universally indispensable. Nature itself has prescribed such a daily alternation by the interval of the night for sleep; and it might be imagined that this ought to prove sufficient. It is very questionable if it does so, even for man's physical well-being. Experience is not favourable to the idea that with regular nightly repose, men could work hard all their life through without further intervals for refreshment, and not suffer from it. It is quite certain, at all events, that the daily interval of darkness is not sufficient, when we enlarge our survey to take in the whole conditions of human existence. We are so constituted, that we sustain a double relationship; we are related to earth as toilers, and to heaven as worshippers. It is, therefore, not enough to say (as I have just done) that the conditions of our being require us to work and to rest alternately. I must add, the conditions of our being require us to

rest sometimes in order that we may pray. For to pray is no less indispensable to the highest ideal of human life than to work; and work and prayer do not admit of being done together. Each must have its own period; because each calls for the whole energy of the man. It is almost self-evident that nocturnal rest does not adequately meet this supreme necessity of a perfect human life; because its sole object is to recuperate exhausted strength. It may now and then be needful that men watch in the night in order to pray; but vigils stolen from slumber cannot be the normal time for worship; and in practice it is found that such moments as can be snatched morning or evening from daily toil or business for a hurried act of devotion are insufficient to sustain the highest spiritual life. Of this the instance of our Blessed Lord may serve to convince us, together with the fact, that wherever the religious nature has attained high development, more time has been devoted to worship or to spiritual contemplation than the ordinary demands of existence can spare out of a normal working day. Some other break in our toil is therefore called for, besides the hours of sleep; some break which, if less frequent, shall be more effectual for the highest kind of refreshment; some break which shall not find us too worn out for communion with heaven.

A "Sabbath," therefore, seems to be de-

manded by the conditions under which we are placed in this world; probably demanded in order to mere rest; certainly demanded in order to such rest as can be devoted to the needs of our higher and religious nature. And if ever a weekly break in the routine of secular business was found to be a necessity of healthy life, it must be so under the strain and tension of a modern city. We live in an age of hurry and pressure far more out-wearing and exacting than our fathers knew. I take it to be a simple physiological fact that if modern business men fling away this Sunday rest or misuse it, the physical deterioration which is at present supposed to be going on among us must go on the faster, and the nerve power of our race be so much the more speedily exhausted. Religious people undoubtedly derive some sanatory advantage from the fact that during one-seventh of the week they conscientiously divert their thoughts and their energy out of the groove of the other six days into a totally different one. The mere change from daily affairs to religious interests is of itself a kind of rest. Yet, while this is true, I am afraid some of us do not use the Sabbath so much as we ought to do for its primary purpose of repose. The tension of the age strains the Church likewise. Very active useful Christians are apt to put into the one day

when they have leisure for Christian or benevolent activity, such an excessive amount of it, that Sunday becomes as hard-worked a day as any other. It is a generous weakness which may be said to lean to virtue's side. But in the end it will be found poor economy. We do, in the long run, most for our Master when we respect His laws, by securing for ourselves that proportion of rest which He has seen to be needful in order that we may continue working for the longest period and in the most effective fashion.

What that proportion exactly is on the average, it might have been long before physiology had found out for us. I am content to take it on divine authority at one-seventh. The division of time by weeks is so far an arbitrary one that the week is not determined, like the year or the month, by astronomical facts. But if it repose on a law of health, if it answer to the physical requirements of the human organism under normal conditions, then it is in reality no more arbitrary than the seasons of the year. The ancient record which traces it back to the creation of man is possibly meant to emphasize this hidden correspondence betwixt a seventh day rest and our physical necessities. So deep is that word of our Lord —"The Sabbath was made for man!"

On that ancient record of creation with its

account of the institution of the weekly rest, this Fourth Commandment expressly plants itself. I do not feel called upon to discuss here the slight evidence which we possess for the observance of the day in times earlier than the Decalogue, because the Decalogue itself assumes such previous observance by its very terms. It does not speak as a law would which for the first time set up a weekly festival before unheard of. It simply calls to the recollection of the people an institution, which, like circumcision or like sacrifice, had necessarily slipped out of general public usage under the hard conditions of Egyptian slavery. "Remember the Sabbath day," it begins; which appears to me to be impossible language if no mortal had ever heard of a Sabbath day before.

The reason, too, on which the observance is based, not only goes back to the very origin of mankind, but likewise implies the universal and lasting character of the institution. That God Himself made the world on the scheme of a seven-fold division of time, wherein six parts were given to labour and one to repose—however you may understand that very strange and enigmatical revelation—is at all events not a reason which you can limit to Hebrew men or to Mosaic ages. If it be a reason for keeping one day in seven at all, it is certainly as good a reason for one man or one generation

of men as for another. It is clearly valid everywhere, always, and for everybody. If that does not make it a "moral" law, in the sense in which anyone elects to use that term, at all events it gives it a very good right to stand where it does, in a summary of fundamental religious duties.

It is unquestionably the case that the seventh day rest did receive a quite peculiar character for Hebrews under the legislation of Moses. For one thing, its place in the statute law of the realm made its violation a civil crime. It was punishable with the capital penalty, as were the preceding laws. Besides this, it was constituted into a sort of sacramental sign or pledge of Israel's exceptional covenant with Jehovah. "It is a sign," said God, "between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am Jehovah that doth sanctify you."* The meaning probably was that precisely as one day in the week was fenced off to be "holy," or devoted to Jehovah, so was Israel the one nation which God had separated from the ordinary lot of commonwealths to be peculiarly His own. It may have a certain bearing on this special significance imported into the institution, when we find in the version of the Decalogue which the Book of Deuteronomy contains that a new reason for

* Exodus xxxi. 13.

keeping it is substituted for the old one—a national for a world-wide one. It is not there written, as in the original edition given in Exodus: "Because in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth"; but it is: "Remember that thou wast a slave in the land of Egypt and Jehovah thy God brought thee out thence, therefore Jehovah thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day." It is possible, certainly, that the force of this reasoning may simply be: "God lightened your fathers' grievous bondage and toil of old; therefore be merciful to your bondmen and let them rest one day in the week." But I rather believe it means more than that. Jehovah had become by the Exodus Israel's Redeemer and covenant God: let the blessed Sabbath be the token that Israel is true to its separation and consecration unto Jehovah as His peculiar people. However this may be, one can see that the national and temporary reason assigned in Deuteronomy for Sabbath keeping enters as an after-thought or subordinate argument; whereas the original and essential reason remains as ever the divine plan and divine example in the very creation of the human family. God Himself is a worker and a rester. On that occasion His work and rest followed this fixed proportion of six to one. He has so made man and man's world that our highest interests shall be served

by His children's loyal imitation of His example, both in the toil of six days and in the repose of one.

What has been said above on the dual design of the Sabbatic rest may afford us a fairly sufficient guide through the difficulties which confessedly surround its practical observance; especially when we carry with us those pregnant hints which fell from our Lord's own lips. The imperative tone which properly belongs to a law, the absence, which could scarcely be avoided, of any modifying glosses, the dreadful death penalty which attached to it in the Hebrew State, and the minutely oppressive casuistry of the Jewish doctors; all these things put together have caused men to turn away from what is termed Sabbatarianism as from a gloomy and vexatious yoke. But our Lord brought into prominence, as the ruling idea of the day, in harmony with which the details of its observance are to be adjusted, that it is designed for a blessing to mankind. The Sabbath was made for man's sake: it follows that it is lawful to do good to men on the Sabbath day. To reconcile the greatest possible amount of the highest kind of benefit to the largest number of people with the least possible burden to the serving few,* is a

* That some few must serve for the sake of others is no discovery of New Testament times. As our Lord reminded the Pharisees, even under the Law the Priests broke the Sabbath and were blameless.—Matt. xii. 5.

problem always before the Christian public. Under such novel and complicated conditions as beset modern society, it is a problem encompassed with very formidable difficulties indeed. No solution of it is likely to satisfy all parties; some must lose their Sabbath rest in whole or in part under any arrangements you please; not all who do so are likely to make the surrender cheerfully. The case is obviously one, not for bitterness or recrimination between the advocates of a stricter and of a freer public policy in the observance of the day, but for mutual toleration with as patient and charitable a consideration as we can give to all the interests involved. Every man is entitled to have his own claim for the utmost possible enjoyment of the day's rest allowed and tenderly considered. If he must give up a portion of it for some more general advantage, the sacrifice ought to be reluctantly asked for at his hands, yet conceded by him in a generous spirit. As to those differences of opinion which are inevitable regarding the best use to which the day can be put, every man, while endeavouring to be fully persuaded in his own mind, ought to concede to his neighbour an equal liberty.

In saying this, I have in view those questions which divide the public as to the limits of legislative interference, or as to the demands which society may fairly make upon the service of in-

dividuals or of classes. Much less difficulty will usually be experienced, I think, by any devout and intelligent Christian in determining his own private duty in this vexed matter. The fundamental conception of the day is, that it is one of cessation from ordinary business toil, and especially from grinding or exhausting toil. Most of us under the shelter of the law of England find that rest fairly secured to us, and we must take care not to fling away the benefit of it through our own indiscretion. Those who are compelled by domestic ties, or by their duty to society, to sacrifice their own rest for the sake of others, will find compensation if they do so with Christian cheerfulness as an offering to God and to the good of their neighbours. If they cannot do this with a clear conscience, they ought of course to seek an escape from so trying a position. But no one can be at liberty to carry on any needless occupation on Sunday simply for the sake of private gain. And no Christian ought to ask from any other a service entailing Sunday work, unless he himself would be prepared, were the situation reversed, to render to his neighbour a similar service.

As to the use to be made of Sunday leisure, when it has been secured, the cardinal rule to attend to is, that God has given the interval of repose, not only for the physical, but no less for the religious and moral benefit of ourselves and

others. As rest, it is a boon to our physical frames; as rest in order to meditate and pray, it is a boon beyond all price to that higher part of us which links us with God and the eternal world. The motive of humanity—to ease the burden of toil for the hard-working classes and for the creatures which minister to man's convenience—this is one side of the law which appeals to everybody, and ought to secure for a careful observance of the day the suffrages of humane secularists. But the motive of devotion—to give us a pause for worship amid the fret of existence, and train us to lift our spirits into more tranquil and undisturbed converse with the Father of our spirits than is possible on any other day—this is that side of the law which speaks most powerfully to every religious mind.

Here again, details must, under Christian freedom, be left to each Christian man. How much of the day should be given to public, how much to private, worship; how far personal profit is to be sought, how far the profit of others; in what proportion social and family intercourse, sweet and grave in its kindliness, may relieve the more solemn exercises of devotion; what occupation for mind or body is conducive to the highest uses of the day or consistent with them, and what is not—on all this the full grown disciple of Christ is entitled to be

his own Mentor, and he is qualified to be so. For such details are determined by such various considerations, of one's own age, physique, intelligence, spiritual attainment, as well as by the claims of others, that no man's case can be a law for his brother.

Let each of us lay this well to heart that our Sabbaths are a gift from our kind Father of quite unspeakable value. Used in the best way, they deserve all the eloquent eulogiums which piety has pronounced upon them. They do make stepping stones for our feet to walk to heaven by. They open to us at the way-side so many oratories and Bethel-like retreats where we may refresh our jaded spiritual nature, cultivate closer acquaintance with Christ, offer to God a less hurried praise, clear ourselves from the dust of time, re-examine the foundations of our confidence, scrutinize our motives, repair our faults, and revive our drooping ardour in the task of self-discipline for eternal bliss. To make the very best of such costly possibilities—fifty-two of them in the year's round—how infinitely is that to be desired for such Christians as we are, far behind in grace, and battling with conditions adverse to holiness! To lose our Sabbaths and all that they might bring to us can anything replace a loss like that?

VII.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

"*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*"—EXOD. xx. 12.

"*Honour thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*"—DEUT. v. 16.

"*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.'*"—EPH. vi. 1-3.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

THIS is the law of subordination to legitimate authority: a law which guards the order of society, first in the family, and next in the state.

It forms in fact a transition from the preceding group of laws, all of which are laws of religion, to the next group which deals with crimes committed by one citizen against another. In a wide sense, filial duty may be termed also a duty of religion; first, because it falls under the general idea of reverential submission to a superior; but likewise because the relation of parent and child is closely modelled upon that between God Himself and His human creature. As St Paul reminds us in one of his epistles,* every family upon earth derives its name from that one Father above, whose all-embracing fatherhood is the basis and the model for human paternity. Not that it has pleased God in a way of condescension to borrow a name which properly originates in our human generations. Rather His fatherhood is the original and typical instance, after which the tie of earthly

* Eph. iii. 15. See Greek and Revised Version.

parents to their offspring has been modelled, that thereby we might more easily learn to call Him "Abba!"—"our Father who art in heaven!" Think how closely your earthly parent takes after that Divine Father, whose sacred title he wears. In the mysterious origination of a new life, derived yet separate; in the no less mysterious communication of personal qualities, begetting a son in his own likeness; in the responsibility that sits on him to nurture, provide for, and educate his child; in the power and authority which belong to parents to legislate for their children, and to enforce their legislation by penalty and reward; in the peculiarly strong love which nature inspires into parental bosoms, and in the unlimited sacrifices which such love can prompt: in all this consider how closely human parenthood resembles heavenly; and you will come to see how our early subjection to father and mother is God's way of practically training us into religion. We learn our duties toward God by first learning to honour and obey them.

Very correctly, then, did the ancients catch the spirit of filial duty when they described it by the sacred word, *piety*. It was not among the Hebrews alone, of the early races, that a close connection was felt to exist betwixt reverence for God and reverence for parents. In Egypt as in China, in ancient Persia as in primitive

Greece, the sentiment of filial piety held the same foremost place in public regard. "Ye shall be holy"—so runs a reduplication of this law in Leviticus*—"ye shall be holy, for I, Jehovah, am holy: fear every man his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths;" where you see the fifth and fourth words of the Decalogue are bracketed as both of them immediate results and tests of the national religion or fear of God. In a very similar spirit wrote a Greek historian:† "Nature and the laws which guard natural order have put the first and chief honour upon parents together with the gods." "We ought," said a Latin moralist and orator,‡ "to venerate a parent as we do God."

These are strong words. Perhaps they sound over-strong to our less reverent ears. But one reason why the ancients laid so much stress on filial respect was this: they saw more clearly than we moderns do how family subordination is not merely an education in piety, but likewise a safeguard for civil order. The Decalogue testifies to its extreme antiquity by this, that it contains no command of obedience to magistrates. It trusts everything in the way of social subordination to this command to honour fathers. It bears the print, therefore, of an age when the family was not merely the basis of society as it always has been, but *was* society. For the

* Lev. xix. 2, 3. † Plutarch. ‡ Cicero.

tribe or clan is nothing else but an overgrown family, held together by reverence for a common ancestry, and ruled by the elders or patriarchs of the house. When God gave the Decalogue, the children of Israel had not yet outgrown this stage in human association, nor passed from a cluster of related clans into a nation.

However far afield society may develope itself as it grows away from its base, it must continue true to the end of time that every community is but an aggregate of households; that the family is the social unit; and that the principles of social order—authority in the ruler, subordination in the governed—look back for ever to the home as their birthplace and their nursery. The magistrate is a greater father to his people; armed with some share of that divine claim upon our obedience and respect which our parents first asserted over our infant minds. It is in the home accordingly, that insubordination will commence. Enfeeble parental authority, teach the child disrespect, and what safeguard have you for the State? You have introduced a solvent at the very base of the social edifice, and you need not wonder to see the structure crumble into incoherent particles.

We are living in an age of excessive individualism, beaten upon by the full stream of a tendency towards equality, and the assertion of personal rights as against that authority,

which in earlier ages was so often abused into tyranny. We see the effects of this spirit of our time on every hand of us—in the loosening of the bonds betwixt the upper and lower classes, in the weakening of respect for rank, in the spirit of revolt against custom, tradition and law, in socialistic attacks on property. We see it most painfully of all in the insolence of youth to their elders, and in the too early age at which young people fling off the restraints of home, and resent the interference of parents.

We are all of us sufficiently the creatures of our own generation to feel a good deal of sympathy with this intellectual and social revolt against authority under certain of its manifestations. At the same time I think no sober minded or dispassionate observer of society among the foremost modern nations can escape a certain misgiving at the undermining of the home. When parents fail to make themselves revered; when the marriage tie is too easily dissolved or rashly broken; when children are humoured into premature assertion of their own will; when mere striplings can earn a wage and desert the parental roof; when a grown-up family feels no qualms at flinging its aged parents on the workhouse; when reverence for grey hairs as such is ridiculed as weak or old-fashioned; when, in short, by symptoms like these it has become apparent that the ancient

cement of venerable authority on the one side, and of deferential subordination on the other, which used to bind the family home into a stable and sacred institution, has corroded away beneath the breath of modern individualism: who can doubt that society has lost its most precious corner-stone, and is fast coming into danger of disintegration or collapse?

I do not feel at all sure that this is not the sense in which we ought to read the singular promise attached to this fifth commandment. Read as a guarantee of long life to the individual, the reward of filial obedience may or may not be granted in this world. But read as a promise addressed to the people of Israel in their collective capacity, there is no question at all but it proclaims a political and social fact. The nation whose homes are godly, orderly, and happy, whose successive generations are linked together by holy ligaments of love and respect from child to parent: that nation possesses the surest safeguard for prosperity and permanence. Men who revere their ancestry and prize their families will fight for the graves of the one and the hearths of the other, just as they will fight for the altars of that God whose authority has sanctified the ties of blood. When the family is dissolved, on the contrary, patriotism becomes a jest, and public spirit expires; and the distracted people, having lost

the sense of unity and the habit of subordination, lies open an inviting prey to foreign assault as well as domestic discord. Such a people will not dwell long in the land which God gave them to inherit.

It belongs likewise to the divine wisdom which may be traced throughout this inspired code, that a place is expressly assigned to the mother alongside her husband. For her equally with the father is claimed, not affection simply, but honour. To us who have been trained in those chivalrous sentiments towards woman which Christianity inspired, this elevation of maternity to equal honour may not appear at all singular. But anyone who knows the place to which the wife and mother has long sunk in Asia will appreciate its significance. It is true that it was not always so. Among the primitive peoples, the female sex seems to have enjoyed, speaking generally, a far greater measure both of freedom and of respect than in modern lands which have been blighted by the Moslem's touch. Still, long before the rise of Mahommedanism, it was the tendency of oriental thought to depreciate and enslave the feebler sex; a tendency which among the Hebrews was all along resisted and counteracted. From the days of Sarah to the days of Mary, Hebrew story is full of instances that teach us how honourable was the place assigned to the Jewess.

Hebrew women could be prophets, poets, rulers, and patriots, without any feeling that they had overstepped the limits of their sex. The didactic parts of the Old Testament, such as the Book of Proverbs, urge reverence for the mother equally with the father. No finer picture of wifely duty can be found in literature than "the words that King Lemuel's mother taught him." No sweeter song was ever sung in praise of pure and constant love, triumphing over seduction, than "the Song of Songs which is Solomon's."* Christianity inherited this noble tradition of reverence for woman from its mother Judaism; and the divine seal that has been for ever set upon the uniform teaching of Scripture on this head is this august word of command from Sinai which enjoins upon every man to revere the mother who bore him.

In proceeding next to point out how this sacred and, as we have seen, almost religious obligation of domestic piety is to be discharged, it is fair to remind ourselves that the child has a right to expect from the parents such conduct on their side as shall deserve reverence on his. It is true that the faults of parents do not absolve children from their duty, and cannot in any case justify disrespect. Whoever is entitled

* It is that *at least*, without prejudice to the views of those who read in it a spiritual allegory as well.

to upbraid transgressors with their shame, it is not a son who may permit himself that liberty with impunity. The primeval curse upon Ham rises in the dawn of human history as a mysterious warning against an offence so shameless and unnatural. The feeling which that curse expressed has found many an echo. "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother!" * "The eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother—the ravens of the valley shall pick it out."† It is an indignation positively fierce which such words express; and there is in every bosom an answering instinct which counts that child base who can taunt a parent with his infirmity, expose his misconduct, or be ashamed of him for his poverty or his ignorance.

At the same time, the best that any dutiful child can do for a contemptible or discreditable parent is to bear with him, to cherish a secret charity that hopes the best, to cloak his disgrace as far as possible, and in his heart to stifle and to bury the scorn which toward any other man of similar character it would be permissible to utter. If fathers and mothers desire at their children's hands anything more than this, if they would win that rare blessing, true honour and esteem, and not the mere mask or show of it, then let them see that they deserve it. Surely

* Deut. xxvii. 16. † Prov. xxx. 17.

it should be the boast of every parent so to live that none of his posterity shall ever need to blush at his memory. By preserving untarnished the name he is to bequeath to his son ; by tempering familiarity with gravity, and softening parental authority by parental tenderness ; by making himself the confidant and companion as well as the ruler of his family ; above all, by being himself, so far as human frailty will allow, the honourable gentleman he would train his son to become : thus should it be every father's ambition to deserve, and to win, and till old age to keep, the undisguised esteem and veneration of his offspring, a veneration that glows into honest pride and melts into admiring love.

The piety with which children ought to repay parental claims comprises a variety of elements, all gathered up with admirable skill under this single word—" honour."

Three elements stand out conspicuous : respect, obedience, affection. The true child must learn to *revere* his father and mother, partly because they are older and wiser than he ; partly because they are the fountains of his being ; partly, too, because they are his models, and deserve reverence for the gravity of their virtue ; most of all, because they are God's own vicegerents to him, wearing a little of that awful attribute of authority, or rightful command, which is at its fountain head the prerogative of

the Divine Majesty. For, after all, we shall quite fail to understand the peculiar claim of parents over the veneration of the child, unless we trace it back to this basis, in a natural authority which is a reflection from God's own, and is sustained in its just exercise by the will of God. You who are parents are kings by a divine right. With gentle, yet irresistible, absolute, and (save to God) irresponsible authority, it is yours to rule the unformed little subjects of your realm. Woe be to you if your sway be with harshness, and not (like the Divine Father's) inspired by patient, unselfish love. For this reason, your child ought to revere you for the sake of your office, and for the sake of Him whose representative at the outset of his life you must be in his eyes. For his very earliest lessons in divine law and order and constraint, as well as in divine benignity, pitifulness, providence, and forgiveness, the infant has but one teacher—the parent, who stands to him in the place of God.

It belongs to the respect due to such a relationship and inspired by it, that the child should be modest and lowly before his parents; should covet their praise as his best reward, and fear their censure as his keenest pain; should meekly recognise their superiority and delight in their honour; should cherish to his latest hour, pious, grateful, and trustful thoughts concerning them.

But what pre-eminently belongs to it during a child's minority is that he should be subject to their will; and this is so important a department of filial piety that I have given it a place by itself. *Obedience*, I said, is a second element in the "honour" due to parents.

The duty of obedience in the immature child is literally unlimited, save by the express command of our higher Parent, God Himself. It offers to us the only instance among human relationships in which one person's will is lawfully subjected to that of another throughout all the details of his conduct. The young child has no right to dispute commands because he has not the ability to sit in judgment on them. No responsibility for the rightness or wrongness of what he is told to do rests with him. That is the parent's affair. With the child is solely the responsibility to do as he is bid. No such subordination of one person to another can be possible betwixt adults, for in respect of personal responsibility grown people are one another's equals, and each holds directly or at first hand from God, the lord of the conscience. It is the immature or undeveloped moral nature of a child which justifies his subordination to father and mother. He does not, so long as he is merely a child, hold directly of God as the director of his conscience. There is an intermediate link. The parent is to him during his

ignorance and incapacity to judge for himself, the interpreter of the divine will; and for him loyalty means subjection to that interpreter of duty. Filial obedience, therefore, behoves to be implicit, prompt, unquestioning, and cheerful, based on confidence in the law-giver, neither extorted by fear nor bribed by the hope of reward. It should be, in its lower degree, a picture of a man's free and son-like obedience to the Supreme Father of our spirits.

It is plain that what has just been said holds to its full extent only of the young child. It obtains so long as, and in so far as, children are so immature as to be incapable of direct responsibility for their actions to God. By degrees, the moral nature of the growing boy or girl opens out to comprehend the reasonableness of duty. The claims of a Higher than earthly parents slowly grows up in the background to overshadow their derived authority. A consciousness of having the right as well as the power to judge and act for oneself awakens in the bosom. A little longer, and the youth is become a man. Parents should be very careful not to prolong unduly the exercise of their mere will, nor to obtrude their authority needlessly after the right of self-government has thus asserted itself. Happy are those young persons who have been led in good time to see the reasons for what, as children, they were required

to do without reasons; who have heard the voice of a more awful yet far more loving Father, first confirming, and then superseding, the commands of earthly parents; and who have learned as His children to walk of their own accord in those pleasant paths of obedient virtue into which their unconscious steps had been early guided by a mother's gentle hand and a father's watchful eye.

For them—the grown-up sons and daughters, whether they linger content beneath the old roof-tree, or build for themselves a happy nest elsewhere—for them, the old duty of obedience has changed its form. It is not theirs now as when they were children to act unquestioning upon a parent's word. But it will still be their seemly and pleasant privilege to consult the wishes of an aged parent so far as may at all consist with newer claims and more urgent or more sacred interests. The deference of a grown-up son or daughter to the preferences and requests of the parent, is no less beautiful than the implicit subordination of the child, because it is more spontaneous, and can only come of honour and of love. No tinge of fear mars its charm. No suspicion of compulsion robs it of grace.

For here is the last and best element which I named in filial "honour" — the one that comes the quickest, and abides unchanged the

longest; I mean filial *love*. But of this what need to speak? Other duties of offspring to parent may be commanded: affection comes unsought—it must be won by affection. It is your earliest and surest key as parents to the confidence, reverence, and submission of your child—that instinctive love which begins to burn so soon in speechless infancy, utters itself with touching unreserve in guileless childhood, and is often the only way to rule the wayward will of boyhood. It survives adolescence. It survives the independence of adult life. It survives the separate home and the sundered interests. It survives the formation of new ties and the growth of younger loves. It survives life's manifold storms and changes. It survives the old age of parents, their dotage, decay, and death. Beautiful always, it is never more so than when it teaches busy famous men or active burdened women to forget their public toil, or their household care, that they may soothe the dying pillow of an aged parent with something like that inexhaustible, unmurmuring, assiduous patience, which many a long year ago rocked their own cradle, and soothed with lullabies their fretful infancy.

VIII.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

"*Thou shalt not kill.*"—EXODUS xx. 13, and DEUT. v. 17.

"*Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*"—1 JOHN iii. 15.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

WE now approach a group of laws, four in number, constituting the main bulk of the Second Table, about which little controversy can arise. They are the oldest and most elementary of criminal statutes, based upon those primary indestructible rights of the individual which it must be the object of every society to protect.

The philosophical jurists who have expounded Roman law are accustomed to distribute the rights which the law protects under two chief categories: first, rights which arise from the very nature of human existence, and are therefore inherent in every man; next, rights which depend on contract, or on social arrangements, so that they vary in different individuals.* Under the latter class, they would reckon those rights of wedlock which are guarded by the Seventh Commandment; but all the other three we are about to deal with, the Sixth, Eighth, and Ninth, have to do with universal and inherent rights of the first class:—the right, namely, of every man first to life and immunity from wilful harm; his right next to his

* Technically called rights *ad rem* and *ad personam*.

property; and last, his right to his good name. Violations of these three natural rights in the highest degree constitute the crimes, respectively, of murder, condemned by the Sixth Commandment, of theft, condemned by the Eighth, and of perjured evidence, condemned by the Ninth.

Every community, however barbarous, which pretends to be ruled by laws at all, must possess enactments and enforce penalties against crimes like these. It shows how archaic, primitive, and elementary is the Decalogue as a criminal code, that it touches upon none of those more complex rights which spring up under the later developments of society, that it is content to prohibit crime without commanding positive duty, and that it specifies under each great rubric, no other offence than the highest, leaving every degree of violence against the person to be covered by the term murder, every species of offence against property to be comprehended under theft, and every injury to character to be understood under perjury. In fact, the Ten Words in their curt incisive brevity may be taken as so many titles or headings of chapters; under each of which you must range a whole section of civil or criminal law. Long passages in the Book of Leviticus and elsewhere are nothing but amplifications under these

heads; applications of the primary statute, such as the exigencies of a settled community of agriculturists appeared to call for. Of course the original sanction given to the Law with awful circumstance of terror on Sinai, must be held to apply no less to these later details. He who said with a voice of thunder, "Thou shalt not kill," and inscribed the words on a tablet of rock, must be held to have prohibited with equal solemnity and equal authority, the unprovoked assault, the threat or imprecation in hot blood, and the criminal selfishness which leaves the wounded to perish unassisted by the wayside. It is only when the Decalogue is read in this fashion as the first draft of a code, or blocking out of legislation in rough huge masses, that we can at all explain the omission from it, in terms at least, of such important crimes as conspiracy, bribery, kidnapping, slavery in general, breach of contract, rape, arson, libel, fraud, and the like; not to speak of sins which are not of necessity crimes, like drunkenness, lying, or obscenity.

There is, however, one distinction between the Decalogue and the early criminal codes of other nations, namely, that it does not close without legislating against sin as well as against overt acts of crime. Its closing word—"Thou shalt not covet"—passes beyond the domain of civil magistracy into that interior realm of

motive, desire, and thought, where God alone is Lord and Judge. The insertion of this Tenth Law is justified by the fact that the Supreme Magistrate and Legislator of the Hebrew commonwealth was no other than Jehovah Himself, that all its jurisprudence reposed on loyalty to Him, and that in order to be a blameless citizen of it, one must approve oneself without stain in those eyes which search the hearts of men.*

The practical effect of this Tenth Commandment, standing where it did like a solemn appendix to the rest, was to throw back upon them all a more searching and unearthly light. It was to show that they were to be applied to inward desire, which is sin, as well as to the outward action, which is crime; that, for example, to withhold the hand from a murderous blow would not avail in the eyes of the Divine Lawgiver, so long as envy, hate, or malicious desire raged in the bosom. Read thus, in the light cast back by its closing words, the law is seen to be more than a criminal code. It is a criminal code which reposes upon ethical principles and reaches in to spiritual conditions. It is jurisprudence with morals for its basis. Wherefore "the Law is spiritual," as well as "holy,

* Compare those beautiful little Psalms, the fifteenth and the twenty-fourth, in which the ideal citizen of Zion is described. He must be "pure of heart," as well as "clean of hands," one whose heart as well as his tongue is true.

righteous, and good." * In the very structure of the Decalogue there was left this point of attachment for the more spiritual teaching which was to follow—for the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount—for the deeper words of Jesus and of the Twelve.

Apply now this reading of the law to the Sixth Commandment. It is the statute which guards human life and the security of the person. It reposes on the inalienable right which God has conferred on every human being to exist, and to enjoy the blessings of healthy existence unmolested. The capital offence against this natural right is murder, the crime which the Sixth Commandment forbids in express terms; but, beginning from this capital offence, we have to trace back the crime through its minor degrees to where it takes its origin in the sins of the heart—sins unpunishable by the earthly judge. We shall find that, according to the New Testament, it is defect of love which constitutes the essential sin in the crime of murder.

To begin with, the violent taking away of human life is here forbidden without any hint that there are exceptions which are permissible.

Yet two such exceptions are to be understood.

* Romans vii. 14, with verse 12.

A man may forfeit his natural right to live, through crimes against society: death at the hands of public justice is therefore one exception to the Commandment. Equally a man forfeits his right to live when he attempts my life: therefore, self-defence forms a second exception; self-defence when it is on a national scale being termed defensive war. Homicide by public justice, and homicide in self-defence (individual or national), are the two exceptions to be read between the words of the statute. And they are the only exceptions. For that third supposed exception, which is now disallowed by the public opinion, as well as by the law, of this country, although it remains justified by the code of honour accepted on the Continent—I mean duelling—is morally indefensible. The duel is in truth nothing else than a survival of the ancient ordeal. It is one method by which men, desirous to ascertain the truth of a quarrel, appealed to the decision of God as the arbiter of battle. It falls of necessity so soon as it is perceived that the ordeal, like other mistaken appeals to a superhuman Arbiter, is not ordinarily permissible.

With respect to the two valid exceptions I have named, there is this to be said, that death by public justice is permissible to the magistrate, both from the nature of the case and by express allowance of God's Word, yet it is by

no means obligatory; so that the question, whether or in what cases the death penalty ought to be exacted, remains to be decided by considerations of public advantage—considerations which must vary in different States and at different periods in the history of the same State.

Similarly, killing in self-defence must remain the inherent right of a man, even although in civilized society it is usually delegated to the State. It is a right of which he recovers the exercise the moment the protection of the State proves itself insufficient to secure his personal safety or that of others for whom he is responsible. The same principle in substance covers the more complex case of public war. War is to be justified when its object is to restrain aggression—aggression which cannot by any less extreme measure be restrained. But it is obvious that the same law which condemns murder condemns with a thousand-fold emphasis systematic murder on a vast scale, as we may justly term every unprovoked or needless war, war for an idea, or war waged by the powerful upon the weak in the pursuit of territorial or commercial aggrandisement. History will judge, but she cannot avenge, the wars of criminal aggression, of conquest, of greed, and of pride which have desolated the earth with unexampled calamities. What man can only deplore it rests with God to punish; and punish them He does,

although His penalties linger oftentimes with leaden feet, or creep after us noiselessly as though shod with wool. Empires built up with violence and fraud never have stood, and, as the world is ruled, it is certain they never will stand, always secure, prosperous, or at peace. The state which takes the sword by the sword shall perish.

Exceptions apart, the law which is set to guard human life must protect it against two dangers—against violence and against neglect. The command, "Thou shalt not kill," covers in its sweep, therefore, whatever is of the nature of violence tending to injure the person, and thus to endanger or shorten existence, such as blows given in a quarrel or in temper, systematic cruelty or starvation of children, and the like. But it also covers (and this sweep is a still wider one) whatever is calculated to lower the public health, or without necessity to increase the bills of mortality, although that may result from no act of violence or individual malice at all, but only from public indifference, evil social habits, or mal-legislation. It is in this second direction that the general conscience needs now-a-days to be quickened. Deaths which are due to personal violence, to private spite, to fighting, to jealousy, and so forth, are comparatively few in number. They arrest (only too much sometimes) the public attention, and they come under

the category of crimes of which the law takes cognizance. But the far more frequent and lamentable mortality—premature and avoidable mortality—which is due to bad sanitary conditions in our great cities; to the spread of contagion among dense populations; to excessive toil and unwholesome or dangerous descriptions of labour; to the underfeeding of mothers and infants; to the lack of medical skill or knowledge among the poor;—all this, though it directly breaks the Sixth Commandment, is by the majority of persons habitually overlooked. Hidden away in medical statistics, and not to be remedied by any individual effort, it challenges little observation, and it sits very lightly on any one's conscience. Yet blame there must be somewhere, however hard to apportion with fairness; and a remedy of some sort for a great deal of this waste of life must lie within the power of the community—of that community in which the least of us is a member, and whose public sentiment we are all of us assisting to form. I speak only of loss of life through neglect or through indifference, as it presents itself to our eyes here in England. I say nothing of the lives which in defiance of God's command are flung away still more prodigally in other lands, as in the African slave trade, in coolie labour, in the extirpation before white men of barbarian tribes, in the unwholesome

brake or undrained swamp, in the merciless custom of infanticide, or in the utter absence over a great part of mankind of even the elements of medical skill.

It appears, then, that as we explore this subject deeper we come upon two moral causes for breaches of the Sixth Commandment. The one is an imperfect appreciation of or care for human life; the other is private anger or spite. It is clear that these two mark very different degrees of guilt. Yet the difference is only one of degree. Both proceed from a defect in that brotherly love which ought to make my neighbour's interests as dear to me as my own.

Take first the lower degree of selfish indifference. No one is indifferent to the preservation of his own life. Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for that. In those melancholy instances where the unhappy seek escape from their unhappiness in suicide, do we not mercifully conclude that fear or grief must first have bewildered the brain till it can no longer see clearly —that, in short, the instinct of self-preservation, which is so strong in nature, has been overborne by an access of frenzy, and the guiding light of reason obscured in some fearful tempest of the soul? Now, since every man is found to care supremely for his own life and its welfare, while many contemplate with heedlessness the loss of their neighbour's, what does this mean

but that self-love is powerful and neighbour-love is feeble?

Many other causes have contributed to make men hold life cheap, but they all run up at last into this defect of brotherly love. The old world, for example, had no clear perception of the unity of the human family, and did not hold a foreigner's life to be equally precious with a citizen's, or a slave's with a freeman's. It had no clear light to cast upon the Hereafter, nor any knowledge of a salvation for the soul possible now, not possible after death. Above all, the derivation of each human being from God as his Father in heaven, and his value in God's eyes as one redeemed, these things only entered to enhance the worth of all men when Christ came and died. The result is that ever since there has been a steady rise in the estimate which Christendom has placed upon life; upon the life of the young, the poor, the aged, the servile, the invalid, as well as upon what we call more valuable lives. Nowhere can this higher estimate of human existence for its own sake, and of whatever ministers to its happy continuance, be better seen than in the medical art of modern Europe. With the noble profession of healers among us, it has become not simply a point of honour, but the one fixed idea which rules in practice, that nothing is to be grudged, no skill, no pains, no outlay, no fatigue, which

promises to prolong even for a single day the most worthless life in the most humble of patients. In this splendid battle which investigation, experiment, learned labour, and unsparing self-sacrifice are for ever waging against disease or death, here is the victory which is held to repay it all—that the least useful, as well as the most useful, of human existences are prolonged if only for a few months, or it may be hours; and that suffering in the least deserving specimens of our kind, as well as in the noblest, is mitigated, if not subdued. Only from a lofty religious standpoint can such a view of life's sacredness be fully justified. It never could have sprung up or come to honour among us if we had not been taught the spiritual worth of the men for whom Christ died, the incalculable destinies in store for the soul, and the transcendent consequences which turn upon this brief span of our allotted days. But in Christian eyes the mysterious gift God has given to all living, is a boon to be religiously kept until He take it, with whom are the keys of the grave; and One who died to purchase for us the offer of eternal life has taught us to prize our brother's existence at the worth of our own. "Hereby know we love"—what it is!—"because He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." *

What, then, shall I say, in conclusion, of those

* 1 John iii. 16 (Rev. Ver.).

higher, and worse degrees of sin against our brother which argue in the heart, not a culpable indifference, but positive enmity. Is it to be lightly taken for granted that in Christian bosoms no unbrotherly malice can harbour? What say you to the sudden sally of anger which is with difficulty withheld from a blow, which cannot be withheld from the passionate or unseemly word? What say you of a settled resentment against one whom we take for an adversary? How it rankles long within, and will not be appeased! What are your feelings towards more successful rivals in business? Does nobody now-a-days cast an evil eye at persons whose presence is an inconvenience or who stand between him and fortune, at burdensome dependents or peevish or ill-doing relatives, whose tiresome ways are a continual exasperation? Is it easy never to wish them out of the way? Ah, the human heart, even in the best of us, is a nest where scorpions breed too easily; and out of the dark deeps of our unloving nature, there will rear themselves on provocation such ugly hell-born births as bitterness, envy, wrath, malice, and revenge. But "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." To give house-room to such hateful passions, dally with them, or let them nestle in the secret thoughts, is to take the first step that leads to malicious mischief, violence, and murder. Surely love alone, love like

God's, can be the perfect keeping of this Commandment. Let the love which is prepared rather to give life, if need be, in order to save life (like Christ) supplant the devil's hate, which scruples not to sacrifice to one's private ends in its monstrous self-idolatry, the welfare or the very existence of other men. Above that negative Commandment of Sinai putting its bridle hand—a hand how weak!—on the ebullitions of selfish passion and horrid spite, write this nobler lesson of Calvary, which is heaven's own inversion of our malice, "We ought rather to lay down our lives for the brethren." So shall we separate ourselves world-wide from the spirit of him who has proved himself a murderer from the beginning, and keep, not in the letter only, but in its inmost essence and spirit, that Law: "Thou shalt not kill."

IX.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

"*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*"—EXODUS xx. 14.

"*Neither shalt thou commit adultery.*"—DEUT. v. 18.

"*Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*"—MATT. v. 28.

"*He that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.*"—1 COR. vi. 18.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

I HAVE already alluded to the distinction drawn by the great jurists who worked out the famous system of Roman Law (a system which forms the basis of nearly all the jurisprudence of Europe), betwixt two classes of rights; first, those which arise out of the nature of the case, such as a person's right to his life, property, or good name; and second, those which are founded upon contract. To the latter class belong all testamentary rights, as well as those which concern trusts and commercial transactions. The only case in which this latter description of right obtains a place in the Decalogue, is the case of the rights created by the contract of marriage. All other matters dealt with by this ancient summary of law fall under the former category of the Roman jurists. An exception was made in favour of the matrimonial contract, the faithful observance of which is guarded by this Seventh of the Ten Words, as well as by many other more detailed statutes in Leviticus. It was enforced by the extreme penalty of death.

No doubt sufficient reasons exist for elevating this contract into so prominent a position. Two of these strike one at once. First, marriage lies at the basis of all social arrangements, being found in the most simple states of society; and its violation is everywhere fatal to the order of family succession and the inheritance of property. Next, it is something more than a free-will contract adopted for reasons of civil convenience, being a divine and primitive ordinance essential to personal virtue, and closely associated with a very large and very important branch of ethics. In brief, marriage holds both socially and morally a quite exceptional rank among contracts.

I. Glance for a moment at its *social* consequences, which are those that bulk most largely in the view of a civil legislator. The State at its widest is no more than a congeries of households; and the link of the household is wedlock. No community can be more orderly, healthy, rich, or happy, than the sum of the families which compose it. Besides, the continuity of the State depends on the influences of the home, the due education of children, the peaceful and legitimate succession of each new generation to the possessions and responsibilities of the last. For all these things, marriage is the sole security. It alone guarantees that each natural family-group, united by kindred, shall likewise

constitute a well-knit social group, the unit of the community. It alone provides that parental responsibilities shall be recognised, at least, if not discharged. It alone secures the right of woman to maintenance, and of offspring to their patrimony. It alone, when loyally kept, excludes the evils of disputed succession, and the burden of children left upon the State without any natural protector.

So obvious has all this appeared to the wisdom of the past, that in every civilized community over the entire human family, breach of wedlock has been treated either as a civil crime or a civil injury; and in the older and simpler communities it used to be severely, sometimes savagely, punished. These things deserve to be weighed at a time like this, when a disposition is widely shown, both in Europe and America, to make the marriage tie more loose than heretofore, to facilitate divorce, and to speculate upon every point connected with this institution in a *doctrinaire* spirit. Experiments may be ventured upon in a rash hour, when the experience of the past is overlooked, of which it would be impossible to over-estimate the mischievous results. No prudent statesman will do anything that may discourage the formation of a contract, or enfeeble it when formed, upon the stability of which, and on its due observance, the whole frame-work of society has been found to hang.

II. The *moral* aspects of marriage, however, are those which in this place deserve the most careful attention.

1. The law of marriage is a restraint upon the relations of the sexes which at first sight may appear arbitrary or conventional. It is less so than it looks. Monogamy is suggested by the proportion which exists between males and females in the population, and is found to be conducive both to individual well-being and to the growth of society. Manifestly, therefore, it has its roots in the nature of man himself, and is in harmony with the best conditions of his being. Still, it is a restraint; and a restraint imposed just where the animal nature of man is most pronounced and his personal passions are most head-strong. Hence the revolt against it now-a-days on the part of some who resent the interference of social laws with individual freedom. But does not the imposition of such a restraint by divine authority bear witness to the great truth that man's freedom needs to be limited in order that man may remain truly free? Unrestricted liberty of action in anything would mean that the man lay at the mercy of whatever whim or inclination happened for the moment to be most actively excited. In order that man himself may be free, he must retain a firm, wise control over every impulse or tendency of his nature. Especially, he must keep under

strict government those appetites which, though necessary and legitimate in their place, hold a subordinate place, being connected with the earthly or physical side of his nature. Man, as an animal, is linked by his physical appetencies and needs to the rest of the animal world. Here, above all, must restraint enter; since an unrestrained licence given to mere appetite would involve the indulgence of the senses at the expense of the moral reason. These two (as St Paul notes *) are "contrary the one to the other:" the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. The flesh has its place and its rights, no doubt, as well as the higher nature; and every attempt which the ascetic makes to crush out the appetites of the body in the hope of becoming thereby more spiritual is a violence done to nature which nature speedily avenges. On the other hand, the voluptuary's indulgence in sensual pleasure to the detriment of his spiritual powers is equally a violence done to nature; and a worse one than the other, by how much it is the nobler part which suffers.

We are here on a wide subject. A wealthy and artificial society like our own is in grave hazard of enfeebling its moral and religious instincts by over-pampering of the flesh. A lavish style of living; the free use of stimulants,

* Gal. v. 17.

short even of intoxication; too much frequenting of exciting amusements, such as the sensational drama; and, generally, a devotion to pleasure-hunting, company-keeping, and self-indulgence to a degree which dissipates serious reflection and relaxes the moral fibre:—these are all fashionable habits of our generation, against which it behoves every sober-minded Christian to be upon his guard. The limitations of the marriage-bond constitute only a single department (though an important one) of that old-fashioned and manly virtue called "temperance," or the due control of oneself. It is a virtue which has to be learned in youth; and in learning it we need to bear in remembrance what St Peter says, that the lusts of the flesh are the peculiar foes of the spiritual life; its incessant and its mortal foes: "Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."*

2. There is a second aspect of this law of marriage to which I must venture to invite your attention.

I have said that it testifies to the need for restraint upon the physical appetites. It shows no less the extreme consequence of associating the strongest and most necessary of all appetites with a whole cluster of higher moral and social affections before it can be worthy of

* 1 Peter ii. 11 (Rev. Vers.).

human beings. The union of true husband and wife in holy wedlock involves a crowd of complex elements, many of which touch the spiritual nature. It assumes a "marriage of true minds;" for that is not an ideal marriage which is not first a union of souls before the "twain become one flesh." It reposes upon mutual esteem. It presupposes common tastes and establishes a most perfect system of common interests. It is, to begin with, a friendship, although the closest of all friendships. It leads to a noble dependence of weakness upon strength, and a chivalrous guardianship of strength over weakness. It asks for a self-renunciation on the part of each to the welfare of the other, which is the very perfection of disinterested love. It engages principle and honour to sustain mere inclination, and raises what would otherwise be the passion of an hour into a permanent devotion. By means of all this, the nobler social and moral emotions are enlisted in the service of "love," so that there emerges that lofty ideal of chaste wedded affection in which lies the chief poetry of common lives. For is it not a commonplace that the pure affection between man and woman (vulgarised though it too often is in the *badinage* of society) is the one force able to kindle into romance the dullest of human beings, and turn prosaic people, when the need arises, into heroes and heroines?

How sexual affection may be thus consecrated within the sanctions of matrimony was not unknown to the ancient Hebrews. It is true, an Asiatic people was unpromising ground for lessons on this subject. The Hither East—the home of the Semitic tribes—has never been famous for lofty conceptions of woman, or of her place in the social system. From the dawn of sacred history, we find that the early practice of the Hebrew, as of other allied oriental races, was far from elevated. Occasional polygamy meets us in the history of the patriarchs, together with a concubinage which was not merely connived at, but legalised and commended; and these things could not but sully the bright primitive ideal, which is monogamic marriage. Even in the code of Moses, the levirate marriage which he found prevailing was sanctioned; divorce was made too easy for the happiness of wives; and secondary alliances with bondwomen were regulated—not forbidden. In all this (as our Lord has expressly explained to us*) the Mosaic Law had to submit to temporary necessity, and accommodate its lofty conceptions to the "hardness" of men's hearts.

Yet you will recollect what a sweet and idyllic beauty attaches to the wooing of Rebecca by "our father Isaac," to the well-tried fidelity of Jacob and Rachel, to the conjugal tenderness

* Matt. xix. 3-12.

of Elkanah and Hannah. These cases occurred under a bigamic, if not polygamic, marriage usage. They show of what better things the Hebrew mind was already capable. A far higher note was struck in the Song of Songs. With all its warm, not to say luscious, language, this amatory drama of the East is devoted to the praise of chaste and faithful love betwixt pure youth and maiden, love which resists the blandishments even of a monarch, and finds perfect contentment in its rustic cottage and lowly pleasures. It reminds us of the best love songs of the Christian West. It shows that by the time it was composed there were minds in Israel on which the divine ethereal beauty of true love had dawned. Perhaps the fact of its inspiration as a portion of canonical Scripture shows that there was need for the lesson.

Happily the tendency has usually been for men's standard of morals* to rise as nations progressed in speculation and in refinement. In no department of morals has this fact been more conspicuous than in the one now under consideration. Students of social progress are learning to trace the slow advance of very early communities from polygamy or polyandry, through concubinage, or marriage in the second

* Though unhappily their conformity to their own standard has not always risen in an equal degree. Here, too, St Paul's canon appears to hold, that a higher law enters to make "the trespass abound" (see Rom. v. 20, Rev. Vers.).

degree, to pure monogamy; and from marriage by capture or by purchase to marriage by mutual choice. So long as any society practises the lower custom only because it has not yet grown up to a superior one, less damage is inflicted on the morality of the people. Mere "survival" does not count for much. It is retrogression which is culpable and disastrous. Of this we have a notable example in our own century. Mormonism (recently made illegal by United States law) is a return by monogamic peoples to the obsolete marriage type of an earlier and lower stage in social progress. It is a symptom therefore of that most incurable of all maladies, in morals as in physics, degeneration.

Among the Hebrews, marriage usages followed a different and upward course. We have already seen how maiden love was glorified in the "Song of Songs." The Prophets employed conjugal faithfulness as a type of the nation's proper attitude to Jehovah. Malachi's idea of the wife of one's youthful covenant who is to be a companion in old age, and of wedlock as a union of two into one forged by God Himself for the sake of a godly seed,* is a long way in advance of Leviticus. The new legislation of our Lord Himself, while it was, speaking strictly, a return to primeval principles (as He was careful to point out) was in this respect a great rise upon Mosaism. Not only did He so limit

* Mal. ii. 11-16.

divorce as to make marriage properly indissoluble from without, He broadened the law so as to include the criminal desire not less than the criminal act.* The consequence of our Lord's teaching was that His inspired apostles worked out from it a conception of personal purity wholly new to the first century (which was one of the loosest in history), and far superior to any previously inculcated. That theory was a direct consequence of the doctrine of redemption. The Christian's body, St Paul taught, is not his own to indulge; it is his Lord's who bought him. It is no longer common property open for any sensual use; but the Holy Spirit of God inhabits it. It is consecrated for undefiled service to God, and he who dares to despise this call to personal holiness, despises not man but God Himself.† For this reason it is not within the marriage bond alone, but outside of it as well, that the Christian is to keep himself pure; not only adultery which is forbidden, but "filthiness and foolish talking and jesting"‡ — the libidinous look and the immodest word.

At the same time, the marriage tie is exalted into a standing parable of the most holy and mystical union of spirit which subsists betwixt the Second Adam and the company of His

* Matt. v. 27-32.

† See especially 1 Cor. vi. 12-20; also 1 Thess. iv. 3-8.

‡ Eph. v. 4.

faithful redeemed people.* It gains in this way such a sanctity as led one great section of Christendom to hold it for sacramental. Its violation, even its light or inconsiderate formation, comes to wear almost a sacrilegious complexion. Higher than this, it seems impossible to go in the way of dissociating the relations of the sexes from every taint of animalism, or of surrounding them with the purest and most lofty affections of the soul.

So soon as this heavenly vision of chastity for the sake of Christ began to shine before men's eyes, it wrought deep results, and for a great while it wrought strangely.

In the polluted societies of classical Italy, Egypt, and Asia Minor, its first effect was to call forth extravagant eulogies on the virgin state with an unnatural depreciation of wedlock. This lasted long in the Church, and lingered on in the celibate communities of the West, long after such an exaggeration of virtue had wrought its customary reaction of vice.

Next, among the wholesome-minded, fresh-blooded Teutonic tribes of central Europe, where a high standard of purity had previously existed, this Christian conception of the sacredness of the body gave rise to a quite romantic devotion to women, to the fantastic gallantry of chivalry, and to the ideal blameless knight whose honour is as stainless as his sword is keen.

* Eph. v. 22-33.

All these things were results of the New Testament teaching on this subject. All these have now passed away. They have gradually worked out as their final legacy to modern life that unexampled reserve or delicacy both in manners and in speech which prevails among modern gentlemen. To such a length is this reticence carried that it is exceedingly difficult to do what I have here been compelled to attempt—handle the subject in public at all. But this refinement in manners has been only slowly and recently brought about, as anyone may see who will recall the coarseness of speech permitted in good society during last century, not to say the broad frank utterance which offended no one in the days of Shakespeare or of Chaucer. Let it also be understood what such reticence of speech betokens. It shows that the standard conception of purity among the best classes has risen. It shows that virtuous people are anxious to keep themselves aloof from the suggestion of evil. But it does not of necessity imply that there is less vice in society than there was in more outspoken days. Experience proves that a superficial delicacy of manners may cover profligate morals. There is, I think, some reason to fear that we have made little or no real improvement in this respect. At all events each fresh generation of young men and women finds itself face to face with the same

old temptations as have assailed men from the beginning. The same battle for personal purity has to be fought out in concealment, with God only and the angels for spectators. Each of us knows for himself the difficulty of that inner combat. But let no young person decline to wage it, at his or her peril. For if the secret life is made unclean by the desires of the flesh (even though one's outward conduct be without reproach), then alas! farewell to self-respect and peace of conscience, farewell to the priceless jewel of innocence, farewell to delicacy of feeling and the sensitiveness that dreads a stain, farewell to that bloom of virtue which, once rudely plucked, can be restored no more! Christians, young and old, need to be admonished boldly to reverence their own bodies as the purchase of the Lord Christ and the temple of His Holy Spirit. Let them beware how they break down the fence of modesty which ought to regulate all conversation between the sexes. Let them prize as one of God's most priceless gifts to men the honourable love of espousals, the welding together in one, within His own hand, of two hearts, two lives. Above all, let them fear and shun, as they would the plague, whatever tends, even remotely, to unchastity in thought or speech or look!

May God forgive us if aught now said has been said amiss; and preserve within all our bosoms the "white flower of a blameless life!"

X.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

"*Thou shalt not steal.*"—EX. xx. 15.

"*Neither shalt thou steal.*"—DEUT. v. 19.

"*Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*"—EPH. iv. 28.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

THE right to property is an acquired right; but it is founded on nature and arises of necessity so soon as human beings begin to live beside one another on terms of equality. It is a curious mistake to suppose that a theoretical equality among men would lead to the abolition of private property. For it is precisely when two men are equal, *i.e.*, neither of them under the power of the other, whether as parent, master, or chieftain, that it becomes needful for them to define each other's claim to the exclusive possession and enjoyment of any thing. This right of possession includes first, the privilege of unhindered and exclusive use or enjoyment of the article, and, next, the privilege of alienating it as the owner pleases. That is to say, the proprietor in full possession of his goods, can transfer his right, either by barter or gift or bequest, to whom he will. The great bulk of the property rights with which we are familiar in our stage of society are of this secondary description; they have arisen through inheritance or through purchase.

But the question is not an idle one, in view of present movements in society—how was the right to property originally acquired? what constituted it in the first instance? The most probable answer is that the original owner acquired at the outset a claim either to some portion of unappropriated nature which he was the first to appropriate to his legitimate requirements, or to that on which he had expended labour or the fruits of labour. So long as any of the primitive gifts of God to mankind lie absolutely unoccupied or common to all, so long they may become his who will really take and use them. Of that, to be sure, we see now-a-days and in our old lands few surviving morsels. The air is still free for all to breathe, but hardly anything else. It is only with an effort that we can imagine to ourselves a young world where the fruits hang ownerless on every bush, and the very soil is for him who will enclose and till it. The other and more important foundation for property is labour. So soon as a man has expended brain or hand work on anything, so as to have thereby enhanced its value, he acquires a clear right to the results of his labour—*i.e.*, to the augmented value which he has produced. No sooner has a savage cut a stick from the forest and fashioned it into a spear, than he has a right to keep it to himself. "The husbandman that laboureth must be

the first to partake of the fruits."* When the labouring classes urge their claim, therefore, to a fair share in the products of their own industry, they have a sound philosophy of jurisprudence at their back, and, what is more, they have the Word of God. Nay, the Bible expressly bases a man's right even to the most indispensable form of property—to the bread which he eats—upon his labour. "If any will not work, neither let him eat."† That pithy saying of St Paul supports this wide rule, that since labour of some sort is the original source of acquired wealth, so it is the basis of the property right. It follows that for the working classes to rail against private property in set terms or to cherish wild communistic theories like that of Proudhon—that property means theft from the community—is simply suicidal. For them of all people it must be of the utmost consequence to have this primitive right held sacred—the right of each man to enjoy the fruit of his own toil.

Of course it becomes an extremely complicated problem to adjust the fair share of each man in the common product, when (as in our modern industries) whole companies of men toil at the same enterprise; when one contributes to the net result, his capital, and another, his thinking, and a third, his skill of

* 2 Tim. ii. 6, R. V. † 2 Thess. iii. 10, R. V.

hand, and yet a fourth, his strength of muscle; and when the comparative value of each of these contributions has to be fairly appraised. The principle still holds good that to each co-operant in the final product is due just so much of its value (if it can be ascertained) as will fairly correspond to his contribution. Only the attempt to apportion these shares with accuracy involves a very nice and difficult calculation. Practically it is trusted at present to the economic laws of supply and demand, tempered a little by some rough and ready remedies such as the strike, the trades union, or the arbitration board. Perhaps it is in the more equitable and uniform adjustment of this industrial problem, especially as between capital and labour, that the next generation will have to obey the Eighth Commandment. The problem will come more and more to press: how is society to secure that each worker in these crowded hives, as well as the capitalist, receives that which is his due? Unquestionably for any one of the partners in a vast industrial concern to over-estimate the value of his own share in its success, and by any means, even legal means, to secure for himself a larger dividend out of the profits than equitably belongs to him, is a sin against honesty. It is so, whether it be the capitalist who contrives to underpay his hands by overstocking the labour

market; or the artizans who by artificial combination compel the employer to carry on his business at an inadequate profit. No doubt the struggle of rival interests will always be likely to produce unequal fluctuations either to the one side or to the other. But surely the fair result would be all the sooner and more certainly attained, if, for one thing, all parties had a clearer vision of the principles which ought to determine what is fair, and if, moreover, there were less disposition on all sides to seize upon undue advantages. So long as the struggle is to be carried on in a merely greedy spirit of rivalry, and it is pretended that in such a war everything is fair, what can we have but injustice, heart-burnings, and a contest ruinous to both parties? A recognition of the fact that principles of moral equity as well as of political economy, are involved in these economic questions with a readiness to search for what is just and not for the utmost that can be got, would go further than anything else to solve difficulties and to heal strife.

There is another class of questions fast coming to the front in modern Europe which deals with a different description of property: I mean with property which has been constituted not merely by labour, sometimes not at all by labour, but by preoccupation. The land inhabited by a nation is its fixed and permanent possession—

its sole possession that is incapable of increase; and the terms on which any exclusive right to the enjoyment of land ought to be held by the present or transferred to the future generation, is a most weighty and urgent question for the statesman. It is not a question, however, which need come up here in connection with the Eighth Commandment; because whatever changes in the system of land tenure any State may find it politic to adopt, need not trench upon the legitimate right of the landowner to compensation in case of disturbance. The system of land tenure in England and the laws of inheritance in real estate are, and are likely to continue, very different indeed from those which God established in ancient Israel. Among the Hebrew clans a system prevailed (on paper at least) far more nearly agrarian than anything which we see in modern Europe. But different races proceed on different theories in such legislation, and may be best served by different systems. It matters not what arrangement is adopted, provided every right which has once been recognised be fairly dealt with and not unfairly sacrificed to new arrangements.

In yet another department of modern life, this Eighth Commandment does bear very closely upon us. The spirit of competition in trade has given rise to a crowd of practices in viola-

tion of the law against theft which were unknown to our forefathers. The right of a man to his own may be violated in one or other of three ways: first, by violence; second, by fraud; and third, by wilful damage, interfering with the benefits or enjoyment of the property. Of the first of these—forcible robbery—there is less than there was in some earlier states of society; and of the last named there is at least not more. It is under the middle head, or fraud, that modern violations of the property right have become systematic, widespread, and almost incurable. Against a simple act of robbery or theft, criminal law was always a tolerable protection. But ingenuity, inspired by cupidity and stimulated by competition in business, has let loose upon us in these times a prolific brood of frauds, which, like the Egyptian plague, are everywhere about us, and against which neither the State nor the citizen has yet devised adequate safeguards. In a commercial community such crimes as peculation or embezzlement, forgery, breach of trust, and the like, may be expected to abound. It is so obviously for the interest of the trader to guard himself against these forms of dishonesty in his employés, that one may suppose them to be usually discovered, as we know them to be severely punished. The young clerk, therefore, or shopman, who feels himself tempted to cheat

his master by false entries or other contrivances for concealing a fraud, must be quite well aware that he is running a grave risk of ruin, as well as committing a crime. Unhappily the same fear for detection and its consequences does not operate to restrain the fraudulent manufacturer or shopkeeper or merchant: since in their case the sanction of a trade usage has been cast over prevalent forms of fraud; and forms of fraud which trade usage has once sanctioned not only appear almost innocent, but even when detected entail little disgrace and rarely any criminal prosecution.

Take, for example, that omnipresent vice of adulteration. Here and there a purveyor of milk or the like may be pounced upon and made a victim of; but what of the wholesale adulteration by the manufacturers of cotton and woollen fabrics, of wines and spirits, of drugs and groceries, which, inside the trade, is winked at as the custom, and outside the trade entails upon the guilty neither loss of repute nor public penalties? Does dishonesty become honest because it is the custom? Consider, again, how our whole system of advertising and vending of wares is branded with falsehood. Of old time, it was a simple and friendly contest between the seller who vaunted his goods as he pressed a sale and the buyer who said, "It is naught, it is naught," but who when he was gone his way

boasted of his bargain.* In such a contest of chaffering, each party was pretty well able as a rule to take care of himself. Now, since the fixed price system has abolished this good-natured chaffer of the market-place, the same end is sought by lying labels and the disguising of goods so as to put the purchaser at a disadvantage. Inferior wares are ticketted as "superior" or "extra:" why, but in the hope to impose upon the ignorance of the customer? So that the dealer, whose superior trade knowledge ought in fairness to guide his customer to a judicious purchase, is found to abuse his position in order to enhance his profit. It is in vain to say that nobody believes in the lying advertisement or the lying label. If nobody believed in it the lie would be gratuitous. It may be that no sharp or initiated person will credit the highly-wrought puff on the street hoarding, or will ever take a thing on trust as what it calls itself; but all the world is neither sharp nor initiated, and if it were, the scandalous system would scarcely be less scandalous, it would only be more stupid.

The forms of fraudulent practice to which trade gives rise are, of course, endless, and they are continually varying. But perhaps a word of special condemnation is deserved by what is known as the trade "ring." An unacknowledged

* Proverbs xx. 14.

combination among dealers to create something like a monopoly in order to raise or keep up prices above their natural and fair level, that is, to prevent purchasers from reaping their legitimate benefit from the state of the market, is a conspiracy to defraud, of which the criminal law might well take cognisance. Only it is difficult of detection; and to such an extent are we blinded by the idea that almost anything is fair by which money can be made, that even when detected, such an effort to keep up prices scarcely meets with the social indignation which it merits. To the same class of frauds belong those private understandings which are said to exist among persons engaged in a particular business, as to the mode in which it shall be carried on, whereby reforms that would be for the public advantage are rendered impracticable, and the individual trader is hindered from affording to his customers those benefits to which they are fairly entitled.

With regard to all such abuses of trade—the false announcements, the misnamed goods, the short measure, the adulterated quality, the artificial concert to trade only in the trader's interest, and the monopoly to sustain prices, as well as the *canards* let loose to facilitate operations in the money market—with regard (I say) to all such descriptions of commercial fraud, however condoned by usage, it is high time that honest men

spoke their mind and called them by their plain English names; because there are thousands of men, upright minded and on the whole willing to deal fairly, who cloak from themselves the real character of such transactions by the employment of specious words. Call them swindles, frauds, lies, or cheats, and men will be afraid of them. Call them "trade practices," the "way of business," or the "custom of the house," and men adopt them with an easy conscience. It needs to be said, and repeated in very loud tones by all honest people, that everything which takes a penny out of A.'s pocket under a false or mistaken impression, created by B. on purpose to get the penny into his own, is a fraud and a theft in morals, whatever it may be in law.

Circumstanced as we are now, with a deplorably low practice widely prevailing, it is not difficult to see what tremendous obstacles beset that man's path, who desires before all things to make his money honestly; and how in some cases, to break the bad traditions of a business may mean heavy loss, if not possible bankruptcy. These are hard cases. God help every man to solve them to his own satisfaction with a clear conscience! But surely a good deal might be done to purge trade of its scandals and restore to it a healthier and more upright character, if honourable men would at

least set their faces against "shady" and questionable usages, would band together to discourage puffing and trickery, and would try, in their own private business, to deal candidly with the buyer as well as prudently for themselves. That there are some who do all this, both among great "houses" and small, is to be thankfully admitted. At the same time, English trade is getting a bad name; and unless the spirit of dishonest gain can be exorcised from it by the efforts of upright men, one hardly sees how England is to maintain her place for many more generations in the market of the world.

It is perfectly certain that there is a judgment which overtakes fraud in the end. Even for the immediate object of national wealth, honesty would be a better policy. Should an individual suffer here or there for his exceptional integrity, the slow working laws of righteousness, by which Almighty God rules, will bring him splendid compensation in the long run. If we would call ourselves Christian people at all, let us be at least and at every cost scrupulously honest people—avoiding the subtle indirect fraud, known as sharp practice, no less than barefaced theft. But if we would be such Christian people as Christ's law requires, we must read this old prohibitive statute of Exodus under a new light. For the "law of the letter," or for its design to convict

the dishonest, it may be enough to say, with every criminal code in the world: "Thou shalt not steal." But Christ's law is not one of negatives. How runs the New Testament? "*Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.*" * The brotherly love which cares for a neighbour's good alongside of one's own and as one's own, is the sole radical or final cure for dishonourable dealing in every shape. Are we members one of another? Do we love our neighbour as ourselves? Have we learnt the "golden rule"? Are we baptized into the spirit of One who did not come to please Himself, but to save His brother's life? Then, so far from scheming to draw our neighbour's money, by hook or by crook, into our own till, we shall carry even into business (which is an affair of justice) a little of that nobler righteousness which leans to the side of charity. It is the man who, outside the market, knows how to be merciful, who may in most cases be trusted to deal fairly inside the market. When our Lord Jesus would secure that bare minimum of righteousness at our hands—that we do not steal—He does it by bidding us aim a vast deal higher. "Give to him that asketh thee." † "Charge them that are rich in this world . . . . that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." ‡ "Let him

* 1 Cor. x. 24.

† Matt. v. 42. ‡ 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.

that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."

Unless our righteousness shall exceed that of this world and its market places, we shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.

XI.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

"*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*"—EX. xx. 16.

"*Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour.*"—DEUT. v. 20.

"*Putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbour, for we are members one of another.*"—EPH. iv. 25 (R.V.).

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

SPEAKING generally, the virtue of veracity may be described as that department of morals in which the growth of public sentiment among mankind has been most tardy. Among Orientals in particular, indifference to truth has always been a conspicuous defect. To play fast and loose with bargains, to keep no faith with foreigners, to outwit by an adroit stratagem in diplomacy or in common talk, to say to a superior just what it is supposed he will like to hear, these are forms of deceit in which few Asiatics discern anything to be ashamed of. But this insensibility to the sacredness of truth is far from being confined to the East. It was a weakness of the Greek character. Among the Phœnicians it was proverbial. It prevailed widely among other ancient peoples, Aryan as well as Semitic. I cannot recall any exception save that of the early Persians, of whom Herodotus assures us that they were trained from boyhood to speak the truth. In every part of the world deceit has been the natural weapon of the weak: universal, therefore, among barbarians, slaves, and conquered races.

Only late in the world's slow moral development—and even now only among a few of the foremost Teutonic and Protestant nations—is truthfulness recognised as a virtue, or set much store by for its own sake.

There are, however, certain forms of falsehood to which legislators have from the first felt it needful to affix penalties for the safety of society; and against these is the language of this Ninth Commandment expressly directed.

I.

The worst or most serious form of a lie is perjury—false witness bearing, that is, to a neighbour's hurt in civil or criminal prosecutions. Society is so much interested in the administration of public justice that it cannot help regarding as a serious crime the falsehood which, if successful, poisons the very fountain of equity. Therefore the man who "stands up against his neighbour's blood" (as the Hebrew phrase goes), that is, who swears away the life or liberty of an innocent person by perjured evidence whether suborned or not, is not only guilty of a crime against the First Table of the Law—a crime condemned in the Third Commandment;* he commits a breach in the highest degree of this Commandment in the Second Table which

* See page 75.

guards private character or the treasure of a man's good name.

This has always been in the East a frequent offence. The lax methods of eastern jurisprudence offer for it singular facilities. The suborned witness becomes there a ready and fatal instrument either for a tyrant's caprice, as in the case of Naboth; for private malice, as in the instance of Susannah, told in the Apocrypha; or for the judicial perversion of the law by a corrupt court, as in the most memorable of all trials, the trial of our Lord and Saviour. For this cause the Mosaic Statute Book did its best to render such abominable plots to swear falsely as difficult as possible. It did so by enacting that in capital charges—by and bye in all charges—the evidence of a single witness should be insufficient to procure a conviction: "at the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." * It did so likewise by throwing upon the witnesses as much public responsibility as it could. "Their hands" (as when St Stephen was martyred) were to be the first at the place of execution to inflict the dread penalty of the law—"afterwards, only, the hands of all the people." † It did so by punishing the false witness even when unsuccessful on the principle

* See Num. xxxv. 30, with Deut. xvii. 6 and xix. 15.

† See Deut. xvii. 7.

of equal retaliation: "Then shall ye do unto him as he had thought to have done unto his brother. . . . Thine eye shall not pity: life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." * Every measure was thus taken which the jurisprudence of that early age could suggest to discourage a form of injustice which in all ages has been peculiarly heartless, and against which its unhappy victim has rarely any defence.

II.

Next to the lie spoken in the witness-box comes the lie which is also a libel. It is questionable how far the law of Moses recognised this as a statutory offence, as is done in modern States. It argues considerable refinement in jurisprudence when one's character comes to be regarded as a possession which public law can protect or vindicate. There is certainly no possession to be compared with a good name for its preciousness in the eyes of every honourable man, nor any which he would make larger sacrifices to safeguard. But because of its very delicacy and fragility it is apt to be but poorly protected by the clumsy processes of a law court. Perhaps the full and true definition of a libel ought to embrace these two points: first,

* Deut. xix. 16-21.

that the statement be a falsehood; second, that its utterance be malicious. Now, neither of these is a very proper matter for judicial investigation. It is only rarely that the accuracy of an alleged libel can be thoroughly investigated; while as to its malice, that is a motive within the breast to be presumed or guessed at by the law, scarcely to be proved. Pressed with such difficulties, the law of libel in this country holds the truth or falsehood of a statement to be indifferent so long as it is injurious or damaging to the interests of the person accused. But then it has to limit this by a variety of so-called "privileged" communications, always difficult to define. And, in any case, to make the truth itself a libel is to throw a fence, not around the innocent, but around the evil-doer. It actually shields the scoundrel of private life from that social exposure and discredit which are the natural and appropriate penalties for private wrong-doing.

Since the safeguarding of one's character from calumny or detraction is thus a matter almost too tender to be entrusted to legal tribunals, all the more should the calumniator be visited with heavy moral and social condemnation. This law of the Ninth Commandment certainly covers the right of every person to have the truth told about him, if we speak of him at all; nor is its spirit observed unless we tell even the truth in

a kindly, not in a hostile, temper. For, so fine are the gradations betwixt a fair and a coloured or exaggerated statement, even of facts, that we cannot be trusted not to misrepresent our brother, unless we speak of him uniformly in the spirit of charity. Morally, therefore, this offence of detraction or defamation covers a wide region of human speech and has many degrees. I defame my neighbour, for example, if I repeat anything to his dispraise which is not strictly true, or which I do not know to be strictly true. I also defame my neighbour if I relate anything to his discredit which is true, but which it is no business of mine to relate, or which, being told, can serve no good purpose. I defame my neighbour, if, when I am called upon to bear of him an evil report, I make the worst of it, being angry, or dwell on it with a malicious pleasure, or aggravate without need the mischief which the recital of it may produce. Nothing can be more certain than that every one of these acts constitutes an injury against my neighbour; and yet, judged by this standard, who of us does not injure his neighbour continually? For the conscience even of many estimable Christian people is very lax on this side of duty. We permit ourselves to retail in mere thoughtless talk, for the sake of "something to say," stories to our neighbour's discredit, which we have picked up as vague rumours, without troubling ourselves to inquire whether

the story be false, exaggerated, misrepresented, or capable of an innocent explanation. Thus the fair fame of man or woman is whispered away, talked to death by idle tongues, dissipated by a shrug, a wink, or an inuendo. Such inconsiderate talebearing or gossipping of scandals is, of course, a far less deliberate and criminal injury than slander, but then it is so much more frequent that it probably occasions on the whole no less distress. The man who bears wilful false witness against his neighbour by private calumny may be (as the Proverbs say), "like a sword or a sharp arrow;" but on the other hand, "the words of a talebearer are also like wounds," and they have a way of "going down into the innermost parts" of a man's soul.* It would be a very sensible deduction from the heart-ache of the world could we abolish backbiting, and that tattling of busybodies which St Paul traced to idleness as its most prolific cause.†

It is always a difficult matter to determine in what proportion these two ingredients enter into the damaging revelations of a talkative person: falsehood, I mean, and uncharitableness. It is certain that neither of them can long be absent. We know so extremely little, as a rule, about our neighbour's affairs, that we can rarely dis-

* Prov. xxv. 18 (cf. xii. 18), with xviii. 8, and xxvi. 22.

† See Prov. x. 19, with 1 Tim. v. 13.

cuss them without misstating or misrepresenting them; and therefore a scrupulously truthful person will choose to discuss them as little as possible. On the other hand, it is usually the ill-natured bits which give piquancy to such discourses, and these a charitable person will try to conceal. I am afraid there are some Christians who would be rather shocked if they only realized how much untruth and how much unkindness they are unwittingly guilty of in an evening's conversation. They imagine, I daresay, that these things belong to the minor morals of life; so minor as to be hardly worth applying God's law to them at all. I am not sure that it is safe under any circumstances to call truth, justice, or charity a minor matter. At any rate, so much of the daily web of conversation and conduct is made up of such small talk about one another, that what it lacks in dignity it makes up for in quantity. So that it might be worth while after all for a Christian to keep "the law of kindness on his lips," and avoid those petty misstatements and false imputations and baseless insinuations which stab his neighbour in the tenderest spot—his good name.

III.

Thus far I have spoken exclusively of false witness which is borne to a man's discredit,

against that clear right which every man possesses, to have nothing but the truth told about him. It is an advance upon this when the instructed conscience comes to see an essential sacredness in the truth for its own sake, apart from its bearing upon any one's character. Is it a duty to speak the truth, even when no one is hurt by the lie? In other words, has every man a right to have true words spoken *to* him as well as *about* him?

The immorality of deceit, pure and simple, under all circumstances, is a lesson in ethics which the world has been extremely slow to learn. As I hinted at the outset, it is scarcely to be found in the Old Testament. Vows were not to be broken with impunity, and in at least one passage the lie direct is forbidden.* But the baseness of deception or the nobility of straightforwardness was far from having entered into the popular sentiments of Israel, so long as we are able to trace the nation's development under Mosaic institutions.† The old taint of unveracity clings even to good men. We remember how Abraham and Isaac lied in Egypt, and how Jacob was a crafty supplanter both of his brother and of his uncle. We see how at that early period little or no sense of dishonour was experienced when faith was not

* Num. xxx. 2; Deut. xxiii. 21-23; also Lev. xix. 11.

† In a few passages, as in Proverbs xii. 22; xix. 22, the superiority of truthfulness to lying is remarked upon.

kept with the foreigner, or when a profitable though shabby advantage could be taken of a rival. It is little better later on. Samuel is on the whole one of the noblest-minded of the Hebrew saints; yet even Samuel stooped to dissimulate when he visited Jesse under pretext of a sacrificial feast. David is the national hero, and at bottom his character was one constitutionally averse to deceit. Yet he escaped from Saul under false pretences, he feigned madness at Gath, he kept spies and traitors in his son's court; or if these things are to be excused as the stratagems of warfare, there was no excuse for the downright falsehood about his raids on the nomads of the Negeb with which he deceived King Achish. From several Psalms,* as well as passages in the prophets (notably Jeremiah),† we have deplorable pictures of the extent to which, at a later period also, Hebrew society was honeycombed with deceit.

The truth seems to be that in pre-Christian times there neither was, nor could be, any satisfactory theory of the obligation to veracity all round. At most, truth speaking was due only to those who trusted your word, as to fellow-tribesmen, or friends and equals whom it was a shame to deceive. The alien had no claim to it, for he was viewed as a natural enemy. Even

* See Ps. xii. for example.

† Cf. Jer. v. 1-3; ix. 3-8; xxiii. 25-32.

the social superior had little claim, because your craft was your defence against his superior strength. Men, in a word, were not equal; and therefore there was no equal and universal right inherent in every man to be told the thing that was true. Only when the equality and brotherhood of every man came to be revealed implicitly in the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ, did a new conception of mutual duties emerge, and the right of every human being came to be established to a fraternal, therefore a *truthful*, dealing at my hands. Just as the New Testament doctrine of human brotherhood in Christ involved the ultimate abolition of slavery—involves, too, the ultimate abolition by and bye of war—so did it lay a basis for the universal duty of truth speaking. A duty implies a right. If you have no right to be told the truth, how can it be shown to be my duty to tell it? But if you are my brother in some real sense; true neighbour of mine, equally dear to our common Father, equally redeemed by our common Saviour, fellow-heir with me of the kingdom of heaven, then you have a right—no matter what you are—to brotherly frankness and truthfulness at my hands, as I also have at yours. We must not lie to one another any more, seeing that (as the apostle reminds us) we are become "members one of another."* We owe it, each to the other,

* See Eph. iv. 25.

to do to one another as we would be done by to speak to one another as we would be spoken to, candidly, honestly, if we speak at all.

Ever since our era began, therefore, there has been a most marked advance in the sentiments with which the nations of Chistendom regard deceit and lying. I do not know whether our practice is so much better than that of unchristian peoples; at least our theory is higher. We do not altogether excuse a deception because it is clever. We hold that faith ought to be kept with foreigners—even for the most part with savages. The well-trained Christian gentleman smarts at a fib as a degradation. Even the "white lies" of social convention are condoned, only because they are too well understood to deceive anybody. All this we owe in the main to the New Testament. But it would be a yet further advance if we were so possessed with Christian simplicity and charity and brotherly kindness that we always practised the veracity which we have learned to commend. Except in matters of trade, and for the sake of profit, barefaced lying is probably rare among Christians. But the indirect forms of untruthfulness are surely not rare: affectation in manners, exaggeration in language, false appearances in society and the aping of those above us, cant even in religion, and the mask of devotion which is hollow, insincerity in belief,

unreality of life: are we not encircled on every hand by such masquerading play-acting falsehoods as these?—the falsehoods which we term hypocrisies?

IV.

Here, then, I come in the last place to that which is the highest crowning blossom of all in this department of Christian morals—I mean such a truth-loving temper as is intolerant of unveracity in anything. We who are Christians must not let the prophets of this world beat us. I am not to tell a lie. Good; am I, then, to enact one? I am not to say the thing which is not; may I, then, overstate or understate the thing which is? Does not the simple veracity of a Christian call upon him to be the most transparent and genuine man that can be, eschewing under every shape inaccuracy, exaggeration, pretension, and unreality? Take, for example, that precision of statement and loyalty to facts of which science has now set us all so admirable an example. We know how completely it has become a point of honour with every scientific observer, to observe with accuracy, to record with scrupulous care and avoidance of error whatever he observes, and to do both without partiality, although it tells against his pet theory. The same candid and careful temper may be found passing from

science into the treatment of history, into current art, even into speculative thought. Men are learning far more than ever before to search after truth rather than to contend for opinions. This love of truth for its own sake might well put to shame the practice of many religious people whose zeal for what they take to be the truth of God shows itself in very unlovely forms, such as noisy dogmatism, abuse of investigation, and imputation of motives against those who differ from them. We must learn to love all sorts of truth; not merely truth of motive, but truth in fact and truth in opinion: that in nothing our word may go beyond our thought, nor our thought beyond our knowledge of the fact. I do not desire, of course, to banish from human speech the language of feeling or of imagination, with its tinted lights as of cathedral windows. Only when we deal with grave questions of truth—of the highest truth above all—let it be soberly, eschewing prejudice and passion, courting the white light of exactest purest veracity.

Take again the region of social and personal life. A man's behaviour ought to be true to his own inner self. The genuine man will dread to appear other or better than he is. He will avoid, therefore, a style of living disproportionate to his income. He will hate the pompous display of the vulgar rich. He will cul-

tivate simple manners. He will be careful neither to affect in his talk a learning which he does not possess, nor to show off for purposes of effect the knowledge of which he is a master. He will surround himself with such objects as are more valuable than showy—leaning to a severe, in preference to a gaudy, taste. These are matters which at first sight appear to lie a long way aside from inward honesty; yet if simplicity and truthfulness of character are to pervade everything, they cannot be shut out of our homes. Christ is the revelation of God as the Truth, not in one region of His workmanship only but in all things. In Him is no lie. And therefore the ideal of veracity, after which the well-grown Christian may be expected to aspire, requires even the details of life to be sincere and unpretending, with the banishment of tinsel and frippery and unreality from every part of it.

How much more culpable and fatal does the sin of unveracity become when, from these outworks of our life, it assails the citadel! To be called a Christian and be none! To affect devotion and not feel it! To hail Christ for Master, yet not serve Him! To carry the spirit of hypocrisy into the sanctuary and say prayers for a pretence! To strut before the eyes of the saints and in the sight of Heaven, a sham son of God, real child of the devil, is

not this, like the sin which St Peter branded, "a lie not unto men but unto God"? Most melancholy sight under heaven—a sight to be seen in Christian churches! Pray you, let us search and try our hearts, to see if there be deceit there before the face of Him whose eyes are like a flame of fire. Christ is the Truth within whose presence, when He shall come in flame to try all men, lies cannot live. Absolute veracity, absolute reality, alone shall live in that day. If to bear false witness against my neighbour be a sin, what must it be to bear false witness of myself before my God, and lie in the most awful and sacred of all things, my deepest inmost religious life? God grant us every one a spirit of "truth in our inward parts!"

XII.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

"*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's.*"—EXOD. xx. 17.

"*Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is thy neighbour's.*"—DEUT. v. 21.

"*I had not known sin except through the law: for I had not known coveting except the law had said: 'Thou shalt not covet.' But sin, finding occasion, wrought in me, by the Commandment all manner of coveting.*"—ROM. vii. 7, 8 (R. V.).

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

THE nine preceding commandments of the Decalogue constituted the first outline of a code for Israel ; that is to say, for a Theocracy in which offences against public religion were at the same time crimes against the Divine Head of the State. In a community where God Himself is King, the distinction which we are accustomed to make betwixt things sacred and things civil, can find no place. Every sin against God is at the same time a crime against the Sovereign ; conversely, every violation of public justice is a sin against God. For this reason, these nine articles of the code embrace religious offences, like idolatry, as well as moral offences, like theft. For the same reason also, they embrace violations of personal virtue, such as licentiousness, as well as violations of public right, such as perjury. Looking back over the ground we have traversed, we may classify the code into two main divisions, thus :—I. Offences against Religion ; II. Offences against Society. Under the former are three statutes defining respectively the Object of worship, the mode of worship, and the spirit of worship ; to which is

added a supplemental or transitional article, in the form of a Time-Law, regulating the periods of work and sacred rest. Under the second head (or so-called "Table") we find five statutes, as follows: The Law against Revolt, guarding constituted authority in the Family; the Law against Violence to the Person; the Law against Illicit Passion, guarding the Marriage Contract; the Law against Fraud; and the Law against Defamation.

Now, so far as the first abridged code or summary of any system of laws can be complete, this nine-fold code may be said to be so. It covered the duties of a Hebrew citizen to his God, to his superiors, and to his equals. Of course it stood in need of immense amplification before it could be considered sufficient or serviceable for the endless cases which arise in the history of every community. These few brief canons of jurisprudence and of ethics had to be carried out in detail. This was done by successive enlarged editions of the code, as well as by special case-made laws added from time to time. Simultaneously with the Decalogue there was given, likewise from Sinai, a fuller and more minute series of statutes, which covered very much the same ground—regulating religion, social morals, and public justice. This occupies fully three chapters of Exodus.*

* Ex. xx. 22 to xxiii. 33.

Later on, the religious portion of this first digest was enlarged enormously into that cumbrous and minute system of ritual detailed in the Book of Leviticus. Still later, occasions arose for the formulating of fresh regulations. Finally, in the closing legislative Book of Deuteronomy, the whole scheme was repeated and in good part recast. But while the final jurisprudence of Israel grew up in this gradual fashion, its germ continued to be found in the central code of the "Ten Words." And it is surprising how few subjects there are on which men need laws to guide them, which do not obviously fall under one or other of the nine heads we have been considering. If you exclude (1) kidnapping, slave-holding, and similar offences against personal freedom; (2) treason, conspiracy, coining, and similar offences against the State; (3) the bribery of judges; (4) forgery; and (5) arson, I can think of scarce a crime against natural rights which even seems to be overlooked, and hardly any personal vice, save drunkenness. As it is, these are rather seeming omissions than real ones, since the principles which govern them all are implicitly contained in the Decalogue.

Are not these great commandments, then, a standard for private morals, as well as a criminal code? In substance, yes: in form, no. The prohibitive or negative form into which

they are thrown, is not that which the moralist adopts when he would lay down rules of virtue. For virtue cannot be said to lie in the avoidance of evil acts, so much as in the practice and love of good ones.* Had the Decalogue been designed primarily to teach men virtuous conduct, it is inconceivable that it should wear the shape it does. Instead of saying, "Do no murder," and "Thou shalt not steal," it would have needed to say: "Do good to all men as you have opportunity;" "Seek every man his neighbour's wealth." It is prohibitive, partly, as was said in the opening lecture, because it was addressed to men at an early stage of their education. But it is prohibitive, also, because it is the first draft of a state-law, or body of statutes which Jehovah gave to be kept by the Holy Nation, as the condition of their covenant with Him. At the same time, beneath this series of prohibitions, there really lie concealed or implied the main principles of ethical obligation. Expiscate these, release them from their negative form, translate them into positive principles, and give them a wide enough application: then you will have the most comprehensive, as well as the most authoritative, of all summaries of human duty possessed by the human race.

* Let the Decalogue be compared, for example, even with that archaic model of a blameless life sketched in the 31st chapter of Job, and this contrast will be felt.

In this the instinct of the Christian Church has not deceived it. Only let it be observed that this world-wide sweep and high ethical value belong to the commandments, not as they stand in their Hebrew dress and bald naked "shalt nots," but in their inner spirit as interpreted by the instructed conscience. Read in the letter, such a word as, "Thou shalt not kill," condemns but few of us; read in its spirit of active love, who of us can escape its condemnation?

The whole of this underlying meaning in the Decalogue could not be made manifest at the time of its promulgation; it was not indeed meant to be manifest. It took centuries of spiritual teaching by the prophets, finally, it took the Sermon on the Mount and the deep lessons of New Testament experience, to lay bare what had all along lain concealed beneath the rugged words of the Stone Tables. Yet, from the first, the great revelation of Sinai was designed to work in the mind of the Hebrew a deeper conviction of his sinfulness, and a wider appreciation of what the divine holiness required of him. It was meant to teach him that the law of God is searching, pure, and spiritual; that it demands truth in the inward parts; and that it is not possible for unrenewed human nature perfectly to fulfil it. It was meant to bring home to his conscience the sense

of failure, to stimulate his trust in God's mercy, and to educate him for the advent of a religion in which external rules should be interpreted by a Spirit of moral life, and the law be written no more on blocks of stone, but on the tablets of a loving heart.

To see how the Decalogue served these deeper and more spiritual functions, we have to look both to its opening and to its close.

At its opening stood that great announcement, which is more than a "preface," for it contains the spiritual sanction which sustains the whole: "I am Jehovah thy God, which have brought thee out of the Land of Egypt, out of the House of Bondmen." On the new revelation which was made to Israel of the Divine Nature, and on the new relation toward God in which Israel had been set by its deliverance: on these, as on two pillars, was to repose this code of citizen obligation. Each freeman in the ransomed nation, because he owed everything to the sovereign and gracious interposition of Jehovah on the nation's behalf, was bound to observe the statutes of Jehovah's covenant; very much as we who are citizens in the New Testament or Christian Theocracy are bound to holiness by the three-fold Name into which we have all been baptized, and by our translation out of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. In the first instance,

as we saw,* these opening words laid a basis for the First Commandment, the commandment which asserted Jehovah's claim to be the solitary God of Israel. But in point of fact, the whole of the Decalogue rests on this identical basis. Every law is to be kept because it is Jehovah's law, Jehovah who is our Deliverer and our God.

Just as the opening sentence thus set in the forefront the religious sanction of morality, so at the end there is placed an unlooked for addition to the code which serves to bring out the spiritual or inward character of morality. I call this "Tenth Word" an addition to the code, and an unexpected one. Were the Decalogue a criminal code for the State, and nothing more, this tenth article would plainly be out of place. The laws of earthly commonwealths are cognisant only of overt acts; whereas this commandment invades the province of hidden desire. It forbids the illicit longing which never fulfils itself in a criminal deed. Such an attempt to legislate for the thoughts of men's hearts goes beyond the province of earthly sovereigns; it transgresses the limits of civil jurisprudence. Why, then, does it find a place here? Its insertion is to be justified only on this ground, that the Divine Monarch of Israel, in stooping to fill the function of an earthly sovereign, remains much more than that: and His statute law,

* In the Second Chapter of this work.

therefore, while it defines the duties of a citizen, must go a great deal further. In short, we have here at the close a startling enough reminder that the calling of Israel to be a State or Commonwealth did not exhaust its calling. It is a State, but it is more than a State. It is a nation; but it is a nation of priests. Jehovah is its King; but He is also its God. He punishes the crimes of the *citizen;* He does more: He judges the secret sins of the *man.*

It is very easy to see that the idea thus introduced at the close of the Covenant was sure to exert a profound influence on the Israelite's whole conception of duty.

1. For one thing, it served to lay emphasis upon the stainless purity required in each individual soul. To be a law-abiding member of a holy commonwealth might, but for this tenth article of the code, have appeared to be sufficient. One can imagine an ancient Hebrew so scrupulous in his observance of social morals and citizen obligation, that he could say of the other nine laws (like the virtuous youth in the Gospel)—"all these have I kept from my youth up." Never convicted of any open breach of a statute, defying public justice to accuse him of misdemeanour, the man who walked in all these commandments of the law, a blameless citizen, was in danger of transferring to himself the ideal sanctity which pertained to the nation of

which he was an irreproachable member. But the Tenth Commandment formed a protest against the sufficiency of such corporate, as distinguished from individual, sanctity. Was it not a protest against the sufficiency of civic blamelessness, when it seemed to isolate each citizen and set him in direct relations with the Searcher of hearts? To be a good citizen, it told him, might be enough in an earthly kingdom, but not in the Kingdom of Jehovah. Jehovah looks upon every heart. He is each man's God as well as King over all the citizens; Lord of the conscience and the interior life. The individual, therefore, must be holy as well as the State; and if innocence from statutory transgression be much, purity in the soul is more. So much was implied in the Tenth Commandment.

2. In the next place, this sudden revelation of a deeper righteousness, which is so unexpectedly flashed out upon us at the close of the commandments, flings its piercing light back upon all that had gone before. You must have observed that in this tenth article no new department of human conduct nor any fresh relationship existing in society is touched upon. We have had laws vindicating marriage rights and parental authority, laws regulating public worship, laws protecting property and person and reputation. Each added "Word" opened

up some new region of social life. But the Tenth annexes no additional province of that sort. So far as it specifies your neighbour's wife, it overlaps the Seventh Commandment. So far as it enumerates his items of property—house, field, or cattle—it repeats the Eighth. What is new about it is not the matter with which it deals, but its introspective and deeper handling of the matter. It tells us that he is not a chaste man, though he commit no adultery, who desires another man's wife; nor he an honest man, though he keep his hand back from theft, who desires another's goods. If this be true of the seventh and eighth articles of the code, must it not be true of them all? Adding no fresh province to the area which the law covers, this profound word, "Thou shalt not covet," has yet in effect doubled the whole law; because it has swept within its survey the hidden as well as the outer life—every movement of the mind no less than the actions of the body. When our Lord, therefore, in His Sermon on the Mount, would deepen and spiritualise the shallow rules of ethics current among His contemporaries, He does so by applying to every department of morals the principle of the Tenth Commandment. The truth is that illicit conduct always has its root in illicit desire. It is one and the same moral (or immoral) state which begins with the secret

suggestion of evil, burns on through the stage of indulged imagination, of longing and dalliance with opportunity, till it consummates itself at length in the criminal deed. As St James traces for us in a sentence the genealogy of evil, when he says, "The lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin; and the sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death,"* so does St James' Lord trace a continuity of development betwixt the angry temper and the murderous stroke; betwixt the lascivious glance and the broken vow of wedlock; betwixt the deceit that palters with a phrase, and the perjurer's oath.† What is this but the teaching of the Tenth Commandment "writ large"?

3. In the next place, it was by thus appending, as it were, a rider to every other commandment of the Ten that this last one awoke in earnest Hebrews the conviction not only of failure but of hopeless failure. If no single commandment of the Ten be kept as it ought to be unless it be kept in thought, feeling, motive, and desire, as well as in act, then which of all the Ten can we hope to keep? So long as morality is conceived of as nothing more than good citizenship, so long will there be plenty of people, Jews and Gentiles, to think well of themselves. The reputable and estimable householder, whose tombstone tells no lie

* James i. 15 (R. V). † Matt. v. 21-37.

when it boasts that he was "a kind father, a loving husband, a faithful friend, and an honest man," is the modern counterpart of the Hebrew of old who kept the letter of nine commandments at least out of the Ten, and "walked in all the ordinances of the Lord blameless." To such an altitude of virtue does human nature, under favourable conditions, not infrequently attain; and if it aspire no higher, its righteousness may be called complete and its self-complaisance excusable. But then this is only possible by turning a deaf ear to the voice of the Tenth Word. Let that voice awake, and self-complaisance (as Paul says of himself*) dies. St Paul is in fact the typical instance to show us how this last commandment operated in the best and most serious natures. This commandment it was, as he tells us himself, which came home to him, provoking "all manner of coveting," and making him feel that such coveting was sin, till, as he puts it, "sin revived and I died." A fatal commandment, truly, to one's self-righteous conceit! Not content with disclosing ghastly depths of evil beneath the surface of a decorous and well-ordered life, it insists on probing the motives of our best conduct; it puts us upon an effort to "cleanse the very thoughts of our hearts," not "by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost," but by our own

* In Rom. vii. 9. Compare the whole passage, ver. 7-25.

exertions; and through the mere irritation produced by such a futile effort, it stirs up those criminal or wilful desires which slumbered within the soul's deep caves, and lets them loose upon our better will to trample it under foot, till the poor soul, stung to death by evil thoughts which it cannot expel, evil desires which it cannot prevent, and evil passions which it cannot master, is reduced to an extremity of despair: "Who shall deliver me out of this body of death?"

4. It is in this way, finally, that the last of the Ten Words educated the Hebrew for the New Testament revelation of "grace and truth by Jesus Christ." About the Mosaic system there was meant to be no finality. As a New Testament commentator on it observes: "The Law made nothing perfect."* Feebleness and insufficiency attached to it from the very necessity of the case. Every here and there, therefore, it bore traces that it was to be followed by a "better Covenant." Points of attachment were left for that better Covenant to seize, *lacunæ* for it to fill up. Here was one of these. The Tenth Commandment indicated that the literal objective morality of the preceding Nine was liable to be superseded by a legislation of deeper form, which, while it preserved whatever was ethical or everlasting in the Decalogue, should bring out the full range of its spirituality

* Heb. vii. 19. See this more fully treated in my closing Chapter.

as a law for the heart of man as well as for his family and social relations. In the same way the hopelessness of ever banishing forbidden desire out of the heart (a hopelessness which became manifest so soon as you seriously attempted the task), trained earnest men to ask for and expect some fresh economy of divine assistance which should render it possible for human nature to obey the law, not in the letter of it merely, but *con amore* and in the spirit.

Such an economy came when the Spirit of new birth and of sonship to God was finally conferred upon the Christian Church. What the law had failed to effect, because it was too weak to eradicate the propensities of our fallen nature, that God was pleased at last to do through the mission of His Son; and this final, sorest ordinance of the law, "Thou shalt not even desire any forbidden thing," is fulfilled now in those of us who walk not according to the flesh or fallen nature but according to the Spirit. For while the mind of fallen man is not subject to this law, nor indeed can be, so that those who still live in that condition cannot possibly please God, you, if you are Christ's, possess the Spirit of Christ dwelling in you.* A new and holier impulse works at the very centre of your

* Compare the argument of the whole passage, Rom. viii. 1-11.

regenerate nature. It should become as easy and natural for you, therefore, to love goodness and obey God from the heart as before it was against nature. Such a change deep down in the springs of affection and desire is not one which the law had the least power to produce. The mere imperative of the Almighty cannot purify a corrupt heart; and all the penalties of Sinai, although they may dam back the overflow of lawlessness in action, will never dry up the fountain of lawless desire. I may, for various reasons, do so much violence to myself as to curb my propensities and withhold my hand from wrong; but I cannot help secretly liking the pleasant naughtiness which is congenial to my perverted taste. For this deep, sore fault—laid bare to me by the Tenth Commandment—there is no radical cure save one. It is the cure prescribed by Christ: "Ye must be born again;" prescribed by Him, and wrought by Him too: "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God." "Whoever is begotten of God doeth no sin."

Let this law of the Tenth Commandment do its appointed work upon you. Let it convict you of possessing an evil heart which cannot cease from sin, a heart that will not like what God commands. Let it shut you up to the necessity of a new birth. Let it force you to

accept of cleansing for the past through the blood of Christ, and for the future to depend for strength to conquer lust upon the quickening and inhabitation of the Spirit of Holiness, who is also the Spirit of Love. Then, when you abide in God and God abides in you, you will walk in love, and love will be the fulfilment of this and of every law.

XIII.

THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT.

"*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*"—LEV. xix. 18.

Cf. the citation of this text by our Lord in Matt. xxii. 34-40 and Mark xii. 28-34, in Luke x. 25-37; by St Paul in Rom. xiii. 8-10 and Gal. v. 14; and by St James in Jas. ii. 8.

THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT.

THE Mosaic religion was one of rules; the Christian is one of principles. We need not therefore be astonished to find that in effect it is to our Lord we owe the summation of all relative duties under a single comprehensive canon. The Law commanded, and it commands, many things; it forbade, and it forbids, many. Lost in its multifarious prescriptions, the casuistry of the Rabbis discussed with keenness this trifling question: which of them all could be called the greatest? When they brought the knotty point to Jesus for solution, He answered it by citing, not a single precept which merely stood foremost among its fellows, but the one principle which actually underlay and embraced and unified all the precepts. It is true that this principle of neighbourly love had lain all along imbedded in so many words in the Book of Leviticus. It lay there amid a crowd of miscellaneous commandments; but that availed little so long as its far-reaching range or compass was not recognised. Practically, a new chapter was opened in the history of morals when Jesus announced that within this

solitary principle of duty room could be found for every commandment in the Second Table of the Decalogue. To say this, was virtually to reveal the hidden idea which inspired the whole duty of man to man. It was to introduce simplicity into a region of morals where there had reigned perplexity if not confusion. It made it possible for us to discharge our relative duties in the spirit and not in the letter, with intelligence rather than with scrupulosity.

This suggestive intimation of the Master, repeated on more than one occasion, was not lost upon His scholars. St James calls this the "royal law," citing the same "scripture" which his Lord had quoted. St Paul refers to it twice over, and tells the Church of Rome that "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." * St John, though he does not expressly allude to the Leviticus text, agrees in spirit with St Paul by assigning a central place to love as the secret of obedience to the divine commands.† It may therefore be called one of the New Testament discoveries in ethics, that the various statutes of the Second Table, regulating the conduct of men to one another in social life (including

* Is not St Paul here reproducing, perhaps from recollection, the very similar and suggestive words of the *Wisdom of Solomon* (vi. 18): "Love is the keeping of her [*i.e.* of wisdom's] laws"?

† See especially in his First Epistle, iv. 7 to v. 3.

even the last one, which regulates desire) admit of being summed up under a single ethical affection, without which none of them can be perfectly kept, and with which, when it is in full operation, none of them will be broken.

It is obvious that any such root principle, which shall embrace the various departments of duty covered by the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Commandments, must be very simple, inward, and deep. It must be at least as inward as the "coveting" forbidden in the Tenth; and if it is to secure that neither in word nor deed shall a man do any harm to his neighbour, it is clear that it must set him into a thoroughly right moral attitude all round, that is, towards every one of his fellowmen. Moreover, if it is to secure more than a merely negative or colourless virtue, it must be a moral force of sufficient activity, not only, as St Paul says, to "work no harm," but to urge a man to do all possible good to his neighbour. Such a force, therefore, on our Lord's authority, must be that neighbourly love which He enjoins; and it becomes important that we should understand as clearly as we can what sort of affection He intends, and how it is generated in human bosoms.

I.

First of all, then, let me say: the affection which fulfils the whole law is an ethical prin-

ciple and not simply an instinctive or sensuous affection. It is most necessary to say, and to explain, this, because the queen of graces passes among us under a name which is made to do duty in a variety of senses. Very different things are equally termed "love" in our English speech. Where the Greek tongue possessed three distinct words, we have to use only one.

There is, first, the affection of sex. The Greek name for that passion occurs nowhere in the New Testament. Even when the Greek translators of the Old Testament required to express the pure and passionate attachment of a bride to her spouse,* they declined to employ the stained vocabulary of heathen Greece, saturated as it was with impure suggestions. They preferred to coin a new word. It is the very word which we are seeking to understand. But it is not in this Old Testament sense of chaste and honourable attachment of man to woman, that the New Testament writers use the new-coined term of the Alexandrian translators.

Neither does it denote the affection which usually subsists betwixt relatives or friends. That has its appropriate name with the New Testament writers, as with other Greek authors. The love of friendship is an instinctive, and

* As in the Song of Solomon, *passim*; Jer. ii. 2; or 2 Sam. xiii. 15.

more or less involuntary, drawing of two hearts together, by an attraction which may include moral choice, but does not of necessity involve it. What is characteristic of it is sympathy, ripening into mutual tenderness and warmth of feeling. These are not the most proper objects of command, because they are only to a very slight degree under one's own control.

The neighbour-love which can be enjoined as a duty must imply choice. It must be something over which conscience and the will have power. It can neither be an instinctive feeling of delight in the loved person's presence nor an unreasoning attachment based on subtle affinities of temperament. It needs to rest upon the consciousness of a deeper unity than springs from mere identity of tastes; and it expresses itself, not in terms or gestures of endearment, but in a settled purpose to do all the good one can to the object loved. It implies, therefore, a moral resolution which will often act contrary to instinct or inclination. It implies a moral earnestness in seeking the welfare of its object which is not to be turned aside even by his unloveliness or repulsiveness. In a word, it is a settled purpose to care for and to benefit man as man, for the sake of that god-given manhood which is common to us all; not a fondness for this or that particular person on account of something loveable which I find in him.

II.

This leads me easily to my next point, which is this: The neighbour-love which fulfils God's law possesses a compass as wide as the species, and is thereby raised above every rule of moral obligation which obtained popular currency before Christ. The ancient law of Israel went so far as to enjoin the Hebrew to love as himself not merely his fellow Hebrew, but even the foreigner who was settled in Palestine.* Yet it permitted an exception to this equal charity in the case of certain tribes which were at feud with Israel. Greek "philanthropy" required every one to be treated with that degree of kind attention which was due to his position as a benefactor, or a friend, or a fellow-citizen, or a dependant, or the like; but it left all such grades of nearer or more distant relationship to measure the extent of one's obligation to do good. By His express teaching in the great parable of the Samaritan, our Lord has abolished every such limit put upon the duty of neighbour-love. Men still retain unequal claims upon me, for a variety of services they have rendered or for other considerations; but need equalizes all: and the mere possession of a common nature when the needy person chances

* See Lev. xix. 34.

to be my nearest neighbour, constitutes of itself a claim which I am not free to disregard.

This enlargement of the area of brotherly obligation results from an obvious cause. The incarnation of God for the redemption of man has given worth to the possession of the human image, no matter how defaced, and has linked man to man by the deepest and strongest of all moral bonds: this, namely, that they are now one in Christ, and equally the redeemed children of the same Heavenly Father. Just as the disclosure by the Old Testament of the unity and uniqueness of God laid a foundation for that undivided devotion to Jehovah which is the first and greatest of all commandments;* so it is the New Testament disclosure of the brotherhood of mankind in Christ which has laid a foundation for that "Second Commandment" which is like the First.

III.

In the third place, this neighbour-love which fulfils the law forms an express counteractive and equivalent to selfishness as a motive of conduct. It may be too much to say that a regard to self-interest will explain every form of sin; but it certainly goes a long way to account for the wrongs which men commit

* See above in the Second Chapter, pp. 27-31.

against their fellowmen. Hardly anyone takes a fiendish delight in seriously harming his neighbour for its own sake. Everyone, at least at the outset, is good-natured enough to leave other people in possession of their rights so long as these do not conflict with any interest of his own. It is when my rights or interests clash with those of my neighbour that the temptation arises to sacrifice him to myself. The vulgar sentiment of society even justifies a man in minding "Number One." But it is sufficiently clear that no respectable system of morals could for a moment be built on any such maxim. The undisguised rule of self-interest would mean the trampling under foot of the rights of the weak by the force and cruelty of the strong.

Many, however, who see this, would still stop short of the Levitical rule, which gives to the rights of every neighbour an equal claim with mine, and actually bids me consult his interests as much as I do my own. Yet it is certain that you cannot, either in logic or in morality, stop short of this. My own interests are no doubt my own business in the first instance; but if, in the pursuit of these, I am not to pay an equal respect to yours *when I come across them*, then human intercourse degenerates into a mere struggle after all betwixt opposing forces, in which, as among the lower

animals, the feebler go to the wall. To a frightful extent this is what we actually find. But wherever the element of moral right enters, a law has to be reckoned with, which forbids sternly any such sacrifice of one man's interests or rights to the mere selfish and private gratification of another man; whether it be the sacrifice of mine to yours, or of yours to mine. There is nothing to stay the fratricidal "struggle for existence," or elevate human conduct to a diviner plane than that of brute-craft and brute-violence, save this, that each man, conscious of the limits which define his personal rights, shall respect those of his fellow, and forbear to exercise his strength when it can only be put forth at the expense of interests or claims which in Heaven's sight are not less sacred than his own.

Such a respect or regard for every other man as in God's sight, who made us both, my equal at bottom, and as equally dear to the Christ who died for both, must make his welfare an object no less sacred to me than my own. It is plain that it will (in Paul's language), work him no harm. It will secure that every commandment of the Second Table be observed. It cannot fail to stay me from stealing his goods, seducing his wife, slandering his name, or taking his life. It restrains me from every thing by which his rights would be violated

or his interests sacrificed, unless, in parallel circumstances, I should be content to see my own interests and rights put to similar hazard. My very selfishness in fact is made the custodian of what is due to other men; so that I cannot handle them injuriously without inviting a reprisal of which I should be the first to complain. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

IV.

It is clear in the last place that this "golden rule" will carry us a great deal further than the merely negative virtue of working no harm, which, in terms, is all that the Decalogue calls for. The love of one's neighbour is a force good for more than to restrain human selfishness. St Paul is consciously using language a great deal weaker than the facts justify when he writes: "Love worketh no harm to his neighbour." Does my self-love content itself with doing me no harm? Is not the desire which a man has for his own welfare just the one most potent force in society, urging each individual very properly to care for his own, and thereby stimulating us all to efforts which are on the whole for the general advantage? It is not self-interest which curses society; hardly even very powerful self-interest. It is simply

the disproportionate excess of self-interest over this counter principle, the love of others. If neighbourly love is to furnish a thorough counterpoise to the love of self, so as to keep the balance of moral forces even, must it not be equally active, energetic, and efficient? Must it not put us upon labours no less strenuous, and sacrifices no less real, for the good of others, than those which we are all ready to undertake on our own behalf?

It is not a little difficult for us to realize what sort of society that should be, in which the forces of self-interest and of unselfish neighbour-love were balanced. We have at all events single specimens to point to; individual citizens imbued in so eminent a degree with public spirit and Christian philanthropy that these motives fairly rival in the formation of their character the universal desire for self-gratification. To such rare instances all men point as to the very salt of the community. Their spirit, were it only to prevail, would cure the evils of the body corporate, and make a new thing even out of our bad world. It is no idle boast to say that such outstanding instances of powerful and energetic neighbour-love are to be found, either inside the Christian Church, or in persons who, if they reject the dogmas, have nevertheless imbibed the ethics of the Gospel. But it is of greater practical consequence to add

that a Christian Church ought, by the very conception of it, to be a society of such persons; a select community in which an unselfish care for other men competes, not unsuccessfully, with the spirit of self-interest. I am afraid few of our churches would stand a very rigorous application of such a test. Yet this principle of a concern for the good of others, not second to the care we expend upon our own, is one which had its birth on the soil of God's revelation, and came to its maturity only within the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour. Originally the rule stands on an Old Testament page as a revelation from heaven; but it stood there for centuries, a revelation unappreciated, till in the mission of God's Son to save mankind, it received the illumination of a heavenly example. Then it became plain how God Himself understood love—neighbour-love—love for mankind. Then a pure unselfish ethical devotion to the interests of humanity, apart from preference, sentiment, instinct, or unreasoning fondness—such devotion as prompts active compassion for misery, patient forbearance with evil, forgiveness of wrongs, and self-sacrifice to rescue the lost—received its earliest and supreme illustration. Then men learnt for the first time what God in His law had asked for at men's hands, but hitherto had asked for in vain. In the strong words of one who drank as deep as any of the

new wine from heaven, then was "love" itself made apparent. "Herein is love"—such love as fulfils the law—"that He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

If, therefore, you would know what "love" for your neighbour means, learn it here. If you would feel such "love" for your neighbour, kindle your torch at this sun. "If we love one another, then is God's own love perfected in us." It is no growth of nature; no instinct of the fallen heart; no sentiment born of the imagination in tender enthusiasts. It is a fruit of the Spirit. Nay, it is *the* fruit of the Spirit, the most characteristic of all and the most excellent of all; first of all strong and abiding graces of the divine nature, wrought in every one who is begotten of God and hath the strong Son of God abiding in him. You cannot dream yourself into this, as into an imaginative attachment to ideal Humanity. It is of too masculine fibre for that, and asks for too much undemonstrative and unattractive service at our hands. Neither does it fly far abroad for picturesque objects on which to lavish its enthusiasm, but finds its needy neighbours at its very door, and girds itself to serve them with a girdle of humility. This genuine Christian concern for one's neighbours can be shown everywhere, at home, in business, at the club, behind the counter, as well as in the mission room or the hospital ward or

the squalid cellar of the pauper. It means simply a universal respect for every man's rights, a care for every man's interests, a willingness to be every man's equal, brother, and, if need be, servant, for Christ's sake who loved us all and gave Himself for all. Hast thou seen this heaven-born Samaritan, who so loved our wounded naked world of mankind that for sheer brotherly compassion He stooped to heal its deadly wound with tears and blood, and wrap its naked shame within the mantle of His immense pure charity? Hast thou watched Him at His task? "Go thou and do likewise."

XIV.

CONCLUSION: USES AND DEFECTS OF THE LAW.

"*Wherefore then serveth the Law? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to Whom the promise was made.*"—GAL. iii. 19.

"*The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*"—JOHN i. 17.

CONCLUSION: USES AND DEFECTS OF THE LAW.

THE Law which at Mount Sinai was given to Israel through the hands of Moses was made the express condition of a contract or covenant between Jehovah and that chosen nation. Of this there can be no doubt. The first utterance from the mountain ran in these terms: "If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me." * The record in which the first draft of the Law was inscribed is called "the Book of the Covenant." The statutes which it contained were formally accepted by the people on their part; and this awful pact of theirs with the Eternal was ratified in blood: "Behold the blood of the Covenant, which Jehovah hath made with you concerning all these words." † Not less distinctly does the same idea come out when the Covenant, broken as soon as made by the sin of the golden calf, had to be a second time renewed. Then the Ten Commandments were expressly styled "the Words of the Covenant;" ‡ and when that primitive code was

* Exod. xix. 5. † Exod. xxiv. 7, 8. ‡ Exod. xxxiv. 28.

rehearsed afresh, Jehovah said to Moses: "Write thou these words; for, after the tenor of these words have I made a covenant with thee and with Israel." * Nothing can be more clear than that the Sinaitic contract made with the Beni-Israel as a nation, "in the day when Jehovah took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt," was a contract which rested on statute-law, and was conditioned by their national obedience to the new legislation they had accepted from heaven.† So long as His requirements were loyally observed, Jehovah engaged Himself to bless His people with prosperity; but any general apostacy or transgression was to be viewed as a breach of the contract, involving forfeiture of its benefits, with national disaster and ruin.

It has to be remembered, however, that God had already six centuries earlier contracted with the first ancestor of these tribes to bless him and his Seed after him.‡ The very exodus out of Egypt was itself avowedly a fulfilment of that ancient promise.§ And the question is not by any means an easy one: What relation had this covenant with the nation at Sinai to that original covenant with Abraham? Was the one a mere reduplication of the other? If not that, to what extent or in what sense did the

* Exod. xxxiv. 27.
† Compare Jer. xxxi. 32.
‡ See Gen. xv. and xvii.
§ Exod. ii. 24, 25.

later one modify the earlier? Or did it supersede it altogether?

In trying to answer these questions, we must guide ourselves mainly by the inspired discussion of them to be found in the writings of St Paul, especially in his letter to Galatia. The substance of what he seems to teach us there, as well as in other parts of his epistles, I shall try to arrange in a few sentences.

1. In the first place, the covenant at Sinai was not a simple repetition or republication of the original one with Abraham, because in that original contract the promise of the divine blessing was not made conditional upon the keeping of any law. God gave no legislation to Abraham; He revealed no code of morals, and He exacted no pledge of obedience. He only asked for a sincere acceptance of the divine friendship, with trust in the divine promise of blessing; and in token of that He imposed the observance of a sacramental rite.

2. In the next place, it is very vigorously urged by St Paul* that the later conditions of Sinai, whatever their purpose might be, could not cancel or invalidate this original deed of gift by which Jehovah undertook to bless mankind through the Seed of Abraham. The gifts of God are without repentance; so are His promises of grace. And the particular blessing intended

* See Gal. iii. 17.

in the primitive promise to the exile from Chaldea was one which no subsequent stipulations could rob of its certainty or of its value. The blessing to the Future Seed was sure to come, and every one who by faith grasped that promise and lived upon it possessed eternal life.

3. Yet, in the third place, we are not driven to the conclusion that the Mosaic Covenant at the base of Sinai had nothing whatever to do with the ancient relations of Jehovah to the house of His friend Abraham. That would be a most unnatural solution of continuity in the history of redemption. The children of Israel had been led out of Egypt just because God remembered His ancient covenant. They were on their way to occupy Palestine because that land had been promised to their father's children. The transactions at Sinai therefore presupposed a previous relationship with Jehovah which they had inherited from their sainted ancestors. It left this relationship undisturbed. It proceeded upon the older covenant, and was in some sense a continuation or revival of it. But it was a continuation of it, with additions. Over and above the venerable pledge to bless Abraham's Seed, and through Abraham's Seed all nations, there was now superinduced a fresh element. It was the element of legislation. A law was given, to the keeping of which by

the covenant nation were attached national blessings ; to its neglect, national penalties.

4. This superadded condition of obedience to law, while it could not cancel the original promise of God's grace to every genuine Israelite (heir of Abraham's faith as well as of Abraham's blood), did for the time overlay that early covenant so as somewhat to obscure or conceal its gracious provisions. It gave a changed complexion to the nation's position before Jehovah. It burdened the national conscience with a cumbrous system of institutions and regulations. It conditioned all the national history upon the faithful observance of these. Manifestly, this might be far from a bad thing. It might easily subserve very important moral and educational ends, as we shall see it did. Still it could not fail to lend to the people's religion a more stern and anxious character than had belonged to the simple evangelical confidence in which Abraham walked as a friend with the Almighty. For now the nation was subjected to a system of temporal rewards and penalties. Its fate hung upon its own behaviour. It could expect the favour of heaven only on condition of entire obedience to a complex and difficult code. It had continual reason to fear lest, this condition being at some point broken, the jealous Guardian of His statute-book might avenge its transgression by pestilence, dearth, foreign in-

vasion, or defeat in battle. Nay, the individual Hebrew, underlying the same system, was held to his private duties as a citizen and a worshipper quite as much by fear as by hope.* The daily offerings were an anxious attempt to propitiate by blood the awful God who reigned over the stone tables of the Law. Even unintentional failure to observe some trivial detail in the complicated ritual or minute prescriptions of the Law, had to be atoned for by special victims. No doubt the Mosaic institutes made large provision for soothing a wounded conscience, and in the best times a joyous and simple social life was possible under Jehovah's smile. Still, no conscientious man could help suspecting or knowing that at a thousand points his obedience came short. Meanwhile Jehovah reserved in His own hand the sovereign right to avenge at His pleasure the least, not less than to pardon the greatest, of such transgressions. However true it might be that, underneath all this legal machinery, the evangelical promise to the Seed of Abraham lived on intact, it is undeniable that on the surface, the Covenant at Sinai wore a very different and a far harsher aspect than the older contract; that it inspired in the average Hebrew a more trembling and

* Cf. Moses' words in explanation of the terror of Sinai in Ex. xx. 20.

less assured piety * than was to be found among the Patriarchs.

5. When we inquire further what could be the divine intention in this change of system, St Paul again comes to our relief. He makes no secret of it that this after introduction, as by a side door, of legal conditions, with their necessary result in a servile and timid type of religious life, was so far a retrograde step. It was a step down to a lower plane of religious experience than the Father of the faithful had occupied. For that very reason it could not possibly be the final phase of revelation. At most it could be nothing more than a necessary interlude in the development of the divine purpose, called for by temporary reasons, and destined to pass away when its end had been served. That end was one of moral education. To the question bluntly put: "Wherefore then serveth the Law?" St Paul has returned this for answer: "It was added because of transgressions till the Seed should come to Whom the promise was made." † The answer is too concise to tell us everything at once which it really contains. But with the help of other utterances of the same inspired expounder of the Old Testament, we may break it up in some

* See Paul's expression, "the spirit of bondage to fear," in Rom. viii. 15.

† Gal. iii. 19.

such way as this: The real design or use of the Law (though at the time concealed) was, *first*, to impart to the Hebrew a clearer "knowledge of sin" as the wilful violation of a divine command; * *second*, to train his moral sense to discern the holiness of God and the impossibility of meeting His lofty spiritual demands by one's own efforts; † *third*, to impress upon him the absolute necessity of satisfaction for sin and the inexorable justice of the divine chararcter; *fourth*, to convict him of guilt, demonstrating the inutility of symbolic expiation to cleanse the conscience; ‡ and therefore, *finally*, to shut him up to look for and trust in a more adequate atonement by Messiah Himself, and a more effective means of sanctification by the regeneration of the Holy Ghost. In short, its object may be defined to be: a practical demonstration that neither can human guilt be atoned for nor the corruption of human nature cured, save by such a provision of grace as the New Covenant of our Lord and Saviour has now finally revealed to mankind. Gradually, under prophetic inspiration, as the sad story of the national life developed itself, it grew clear to the best men that the Old Covenant had broken down, and that another better one was to be looked for.§

* Rom. iii. 20; compare 1 John iii. 4.

† Rom. vii. 7-14.

‡ Heb. ix. 8-15; x. 1-14; Rom. iii. 19.

§ As passages like Jer. xxxi. 31 (cited in Heb. viii.) show,

Thus in Paul's words—The Jews were "kept under the Law of Moses, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed; wherefore the Law discharged the function of a paedagogue to bring them unto Christ." *

6. Now, let the attention be fastened upon this, that not only was the Covenant of the Law a temporary contrivance serving educational ends, but that it served those ends by condemning men for sins which it could not take away, by exposing the moral weakness and insufficiency of human goodness which it could not remedy, and generally by proving fatal to such comfort or hope as men are wont to derive from their own efforts after virtue; and one sees at once how it deserves the hard epithets launched against it by St Paul's eloquence in his second letter to Corinth.† It is, he declares, a covenant of word only, not of power, in the "letter," not in the "spirit." It is a ministry of condemnation, not of righteousness; of bondage, not of freedom; of death, not of life. But what is apt to strike one most forcibly, when one hears it thus disparaged, is, that such a formal and ineffectual contract, binding Israel by a code of statutes which it could not possibly keep, was at variance with the gracious promises given to Abraham so long before. If God meant to bestow pardon and spiritual life upon the Seed

* Gal. iii. 23, 24. † Compare 2 Cor. iii. 6-11.

of Abraham, how was it consistent with that intention to load them with a hopeless task and bid them seek eternal life along an impossible road? This difficulty likewise St Paul has anticipated.* His reply in substance is this :— The fault, if the Law proved a failure in its presumed object of leading men to righteousness, was no fault of the Law's own. It was a pure enough transcript of the divine holiness. The duties which it prescribed would, if perfectly performed, have made the observers of it holy and blessed. If any law whatever could have restored spiritual life to fallen men, this one would. The cause of its failure to do that, lay not in the code, but solely in the hopelessly injured condition of man himself.† His moral nature is too deeply corrupted to be capable of loving and doing the perfectly right, even when he is enlightened to see it or trained to desire it. Hence the illusory character of the Law's blessings, when sought by the road of legal obedience; like a Tantalus-draught of living water. This fatal impotence of the flesh made the Law nugatory as an instrument of human purification; but then to expose this impotence was precisely the Law's real design and the grand service which it was intended to render us. Till mankind had tried along this road to save

* See Gal. iii. 21, 22.

† Compare Rom. viii. 2-8, and vii. 7-14.

itself and found it blocked, mankind would never have consented to be saved by the grace of Another. The very failure of the Law to save the soul was that which made the Law a needful and salutary step in the preparation of the world for Christ.

Thus far we have been following pretty closely the guidance of St Paul, whose mission it was to light up the relations of the Old and New Economies with authoritative light.

We are now in a position to resume briefly those points in which the Law of Moses can be said to have proved defective, so that its defects called for the entrance of a better system. That early contract with Israel as a nation held its ground till Christianity came to take its place. By that time it had become clear, at least to a few,* perhaps dimly felt or suspected by many more, that the venerable Mosaic system was inadequate to satisfy men's religious wants in these two respects :—*First*, As a system of Law it spoke of divine justice, when what men needed was not Heaven's justice but Heaven's grace ; *Second*, As a system of expiation it offered them the shadow instead of the substance. These were the leading defects which the experience of fifteen centuries had

* The important text in John's Gospel (i. 17) shows that hese "few" included St John as well as St Paul.

discovered. Let us see how to both of them Jesus Christ brought the remedy: "*grace*" in the room of legal right, and "*truth*" or reality in the room of shadowy blessings.

1. The characteristic of the Law viewed as a covenant between men and God lies here, that it treats men strictly according to their merits. Its voice is, "Do this and thou shalt live."* Its form of procedure is judicial justice: "To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace but of debt."† These two, debt and grace, are mutually exclusive principles in the divine treatment of mankind. "If God deal with us by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace:" conversely, "if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work." For the very idea of grace is such that it excludes personal merit. It means unmerited favour; blessings which the Lord of men is in no way bound to award for any desert on their part, but is pleased in His sovereign and priceless love to bestow upon the unworthy. This is not the aspect of God toward us which the Sinaitic covenant made prominent, but it is the aspect which the Gospel has brought for ever into the foreground. His treatment of us in Christ is from first to last dictated by mere pure mercy

* See Gal. iii. 12, quoting Lev. xviii. 5.

† Rom. iv. 4; xi. 6.

or favour for the undeserving. "By grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory."*

2. But it will occur to many to ask while I thus speak: Was there, then, no mercy for sinners under the Old Testament? Had God in those days forgotten to be gracious? or did He in anger shut up all His tender mercies? By no means. On the contrary, there was certainly a most elaborate arrangement for the relief of burdened consciences and the purification of the unclean. Jehovah declared Himself again and again to be "merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." His throne between the cherubim was a mercy seat; and the penitent who embraced these comforting promises found an open way back into the favour of a pardoning God. The explanation, of course, is that the legal Covenant of Retributive Justice which "cursed" every man who did not continue in every ordinance of the Law to do it,† by no means exhausted the teaching of the Old Testament. It had been superinduced, let us recollect, upon an earlier and milder revelation to Abraham. It rested after all, therefore, upon older promises of

* Eph. ii. 8, 9.

† See Gal. iii. 10, citing the words which close the fearful catalogue of curses in Deut. xxvii. 26.

grace to the believing "Seed" who walked in the steps of the Father of the faithful. If these gracious promises had become in a measure obscure, because overlaid by the threats of Sinai and the curses of Mount Ebal, still they were there, the hope and joy of penitent earnest hearts through every generation of the Hebrews.

What ailed the Old Covenant, then, as a revelation of divine mercy? How comes it to be said that first by Jesus Christ came grace and truth, since every true religion or stage in the revelation of God must have much to say of His grace as well as of His justice? Here lay the defect: That what divine grace led sinners to hope for, there was no provision under the Law effectively to provide. To put much in a single word: What the Mosaic religion wanted was *power*.

Take for an illustration its promises of pardon. It certainly revealed God as a forgiving God to the people of His Covenant and encouraged the penitent to count on pardon. But it furnished no sufficient or real means of cleansing for the guilty conscience.* There were priests, it is true: but they were only men like others; officially, but not really raised above their brethren, and soon removed by death.† There was an altar of expiation, it is true; but the blood upon it was the blood of beasts which

* Heb. chap. vii. throughout. † Heb. x. 4, 11.

could never take away sins. There was a mercy seat, it is true; but the way to reach it was not yet laid open.* In form and outward show, there stood in Israel a complete apparatus for the cleansing of unclean men that they might be reassured of divine favour; but it was only "in a figure." The power was awanting. The sacrifices could not make the worshippers perfect, as touching their conscience. The sins confessed were not actually purged away and forgotten. The whole ritual was a symbol of something else; a "shadow," or mimic representation; a "parable for the time being;" a "copy" or "image" merely of certain real and spiritual transactions which had still to be transacted.† Hence, the Law completed nothing as a system of grace; it achieved nothing. It prefigured only; it foretold.

But, blessed be God! with Jesus Christ there has come the very truth and reality of expiation. Confess over His sacrifice; it has once for all put away your sins. Draw near unto God by this Priest; He ever liveth to intercede for you. Put your trust in His blood; it will cleanse your conscience from dead works. Approach the most holy place with boldness: He has dedicated it for us by his entrance into heaven. Be of good cheer; for the New Covenant is

* Heb. ix. 6-8.

† See Heb. viii. 5; ix. 9, 24; x. 1.

established on better promises than the Old. It makes no more remembrance of sin. By one offering Christ hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. "The Law was given by Moses ; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

I might adduce as a further illustration of the Mosaic Law's feebleness and unprofitableness, its imperfect provision for sanctifying human life. Precisely similar defects adhered to it under this aspect. Again, what it wanted was power. By elaborate ceremonies of lustration and sprinkling, by splendid offerings of self-surrender and dedication to God, it was for ever proclaiming the sanctity of the chosen people and their separation as a nation of priests to the service of the Most High. But while it demanded holiness of life and symbolized it in ritual, it had not clearly revealed the only means through which man can be made holy. New birth by the Holy Spirit of God, adoption as sons into His family of love, with the Spirit's indwelling as the Source of inward purity:—these were truths shadowed very dimly indeed under the Old, reserved to be the crowning glories of the New Covenant. Enough : promise, one sees, is not performance. Perfect and exquisite as the Legal Economy was for its own temporary and educational purpose, and noble as were many of the lives which grew up beneath its teaching, it was, after all, to the

Gospel as dawn is to noon, or as water unto wine. The elder saints saw but the blossom where we taste the fruit. They stretched eager eyes to see the things which we see. Without us they could not be made perfect.* For, as the King Himself testified, he who is least in the New Kingdom stands in privilege and insight above the greatest of the Old. Let us see that we prize and duly use our higher opportunity, lest the last should come in the end to be the first. If any of us will neither learn of the Law what it has to teach, suffering it to convict us of our hopeless inability to save ourselves and drive us to our Saviour's grace; nor will embrace the "grace and truth" which are come by Christ Jesus in order that our sins may be cancelled and our hearts renewed: why, then, it were surely better for us that we had never been born, the heirs of all the revelations of God; for to whom so much hath been given, of them will He not ask the more?

* Comp. Heb. xi. 13, 40, and Matt. xi. 11; Luke x. 23, 24.

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